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How to Analyze a  
**War Without Fronts**  
Vietnam 1965-72

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*Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (PA&E), Washington, D.C.*

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## FOREWORD

(U) The first thing that struck me when I became involved with Vietnam was how different it was from most U.S. experience. Compared to World War II or the Korean War, for example, it was so different as hardly to be explicable in conventional military terms. Instead it was a multidimensional politico-military conflict encompassing not only out-of-country bombing and a "main force" war of more or less conventional forces, but a guerrilla struggle, a clandestine terror war, and the like. Another sharp departure was the relative lack of any battle lines which could be drawn on maps, or of the conventional large-scale battles and maneuver by which military victories are usually won. It was, as Thayer says, a "war without fronts." Also striking was the fragmentation of the Vietnam conflict. It took varied forms in 10,000 different hamlets, 250 districts, and 44 provinces. The forces engaged ranged from divisions to individual terrorists and guerrillas.

(U) For all these reasons, conventional means of assessing what was happening usually proved unsatisfactory, if not misleading. For example, conventional order-of-battle analysis hardly sufficed to assess the effect of the attrition strategy which our side pursued. This situation spurred a whole series of efforts, mostly by Americans, to find better ways of evaluating what was really going on. It gradually became apparent, at least to Secretary McNamara and some others like myself, that by far the most useful insights came from quantitative analysis of the accumulating mass of field data by a handful of civilian and military analysts in the Southeast Asia Office of the OASD/SA. I thought at the time that their periodic *SEA Analysis Reports* were the best single source available on how the conflict was really going. I still think so, even though on occasion my staff and I vigorously questioned their conclusions. And their analyses often had direct impact on the Washington decision process, notably on the issue of whether the attrition strategy could succeed, on the impact of our bombing, and on how U.S. withdrawals might best be conducted.

(U) Thomas C. Thayer was the Director of the SEA office during 1966-72, and the only one who served in it from its beginning almost to its end. His analytic recapitulation of the key trends in the Vietnam conflict, drawn mostly from the *SEA Analysis Reports* written at the time, provides an indispensable window on the real course of the Vietnam War. While it does not claim to comprehen-



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sively analyze all facets of that tortuous conflict, without it no historian or analyst can begin to grasp how the war was fought—and with what results.

(U) It is a prime source for “lessons” to be learned by our defense establishment, however uncomfortable some of these might prove to be. Equally useful, it also deflates many of the pervasive myths still common among the critics of our Vietnam involvement. For example, the factual evidence as to the extent and causes of war damage, civilian casualties, and refugee flow is quite different from that so often alleged. Thus, Thayer’s work is an indispensable contribution to something long overdue—systematic and dispassionate reconstruction, based on the best available evidence, of what actually happened in Vietnam.

*R. W. Komer*  
*The Rand Corporation*



## PREFACE

(U) This book has two key characteristics. First, it focuses on what happened *in South Vietnam* during the U.S. troop involvement there. It does not deal with events in Washington, Hanoi, Paris, or other capitals of the world. Second, the analysis is quantitative (although written for the layman), and it focuses on a few key dimensions of the war, using data that were available to decision makers in Washington. It does not address personalities or decisions. The primary focus is on outputs in the form of results and effects. Almost every page is keyed to what the data say.

(U) Two interrelated themes run through the work. First, the Vietnam conflict was a war without fronts, different from the "conventional" wars we fought in Europe and Korea. Second, to monitor such a war, one must track movement along certain dimensions that describe it.

(U) The dimensions analyzed here do not cover all aspects of the war. To be included in this analysis, a dimension had to be considered important to the outcome of the war and there had to be useful statistical data to measure movement along it. For example, Allied ground operations were an important aspect of the war, but there are too many problems with the data to provide systematic analysis of those operations and their effects at this time. This task must await the patient efforts of the historians, who will also have to cover the helicopter operations, the role they played, and the effects they had.

(U) The analysis is presented in four basic parts. Part One discusses some basic patterns of the war. It opens with the contention that quantitative analysis is needed to describe and understand a war without fronts, because it is not possible to follow the progress of such a war by observing the movements of a few simple lines across maps. It is necessary to look for patterns and trends in the thousands of events occurring all over the country. The next two chapters examine some basic patterns in the tempo and locale of the fighting and in the allocation of resources. The fighting proceeded on the basis of an annual cycle of combat, which recurred every year and which was heavily concentrated in a relatively small area of the country. In terms of resource allocation, the Allied war effort was first and foremost an air war. Finally, Chapter IV closes Part I by introducing the forces that fought the war and notes that the Allied attrition strategy did not destroy the VC/NVA (Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army) forces.

(U) Part Two addresses the main-force war. It opens with an analysis of VC/NVA operations, this analysis suggesting that a continuing chain of small incidents of indirect fire, harassment, and terror, punctuated by a few large attacks on the ground, was used as an effective substitute for conventional military tactics until very late in the war. Chapter VI discusses the problems of dealing with the ground-operations data and presents a few tentative findings, but no systematic analysis. Efforts to improve the effectiveness of the South



Vietnamese forces are discussed next, with emphasis on problems of leadership, training, and shortages of troops in combat units. Chapter VIII questions the effectiveness of the air war and presents basic data covering the herbicide operations. The discussion of the main-force war is then concluded with some data suggesting why the VC/NVA forces were able to survive the Allied attrition strategy and achieve a stalemate by December 1972, despite the seemingly overwhelming odds against them.

(U) The American public's perception of the casualty toll in this war was probably much greater than in previous wars, and there was a consequent impact. Some of the casualties occurred in the presence of television cameras, and the toll was published every week. Part Three, concerned with the casualties, presents the figures for the military battle deaths on both sides and then goes on to analyze the U.S. casualties in terms of who died and where and how they died. Finally, an estimate of the South Vietnamese civilian casualty toll is developed and compared with the Kennedy Subcommittee estimate.

(U) A key objective of both sides in Vietnam was to gain the support, or at least control, of the population. This is less important in a conventional war, and it constituted a new challenge to the Americans involved in the Vietnam conflict. The pacification program developed as a response to this need, and it became a key part of the Allied war effort, even though it received relatively few of the resources. It was also uniquely a Vietnamese program, compared to the military effort, although it was guided by American advisors.

(U) Part Four explores various key facets of the pacification dimension of the war. It finds that pacification was cost effective and seemed to work over a period of time, particularly from 1967 on, when the limited resources allocated to the program were increased somewhat. Evidence suggests that as time went on the security of the population grew. The territorial forces are seen to have been the most cost-effective military forces on the Allied side, and the Chieu Hoi defector program furnished, at very low cost to the Allies, an escape mechanism for VC/NVA troops to drop out of the war. The popular attitudes of the Vietnamese are explored and are seen in this text to center around hopes for peace, security, and economic improvement. Although the Viet Cong political-military apparatus was not dismantled, it was battered; but this was a by-product of the war, rather than the result of any intense targeting on the part of the Allies. Refugee problems were enormous; but many of the so-called refugees had come to the cities actually to get better jobs and they should more properly have been called migrants. The land reform program carried out in South Vietnam in the midst of the war was a remarkable accomplishment, and it just may in fact have been the most ambitious and progressive land reform in the Twentieth Century—but nobody noticed. Finally, inflation in South Vietnam, while serious, was contained to a much better extent there than it was in Korea during *that* war, a result of the U.S. programs that were designed to combat the problem.

(U) This book is written from the perspective of the author's ten-year involvement with the Vietnam war, which has led me to view the conflict in much the same way a metropolitan police chief might look at his war against crime. He has no fronts in his war, either. So he looks for patterns and trends and deploys his police officers accordingly. At the same time, he works hard to make



friends with the people he is serving, realizing that in this way he can achieve maximum effectiveness. Nevertheless, he certainly doesn't expect his war against crime to end at any time in the foreseeable future.

(U) In writing the results of the analyses, we can draw another analogy, this time to the sports page in the daily newspaper. There are no "fronts" to be followed here, either; rather one must observe and report the activities of a series of teams engaging in thousands of events. But when an event happens, the sportswriters are able to put it in perspective by comparing it with past patterns of events, thereby enabling the reader to judge the importance of the event at hand.

(U) The dozen or so analysts who struggled with Vietnam data in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) attempted to develop the same sort of perspective on events in the war for the top leaders of the Department of Defense. They succeeded to some extent, although the present reader will undoubtedly arrive at his own judgment.

(U) This is not an account of the adventures of those analysts, although it does cover some of the work they did. The main objectives here are to pull together the key elements of that work, flesh it out so as to cover additional key issues, and try to give the reader some perspective on what happened in Vietnam while American troops operated there.

(U) Most of the analyses produced by the Systems Analysis groups were "published" in a classified monthly journal, the *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*. This was an unofficial document published and distributed as a stimulus to more analysis and discussion of the war. (The appendix to the present work contains a full description of the *Report* and an index of all the articles that appeared in it.)

(U) The *Report* was a "no holds barred" document, the publication of which was opposed by some military leaders. On at least two occasions, they recommended to the Secretary of Defense that it be limited to internal use by the Secretary's staff, so as to "reduce the dissemination of incorrect and/or misleading information to senior officials of other governmental agencies, as well as our commanders in the field."

(U) Others held a more favorable view (see the appendix). Even when they disagreed with the *Report's* conclusions (they often did, and their rebuttals were published in it), these readers were usually generous and complimentary in their comments regarding its objectives and value. Some even thought it was " . . . perhaps the most searching and stimulating periodic analysis put out on Vietnam." At any rate, the *Report* generated a lot of attention and interest—if not enough action. Much of the analysis presented here has its roots in the work published in the *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*.

(U) The Systems Analysis group also furnished most of its work directly to top Department of Defense officials concerned with the conduct of the war, much of the work indeed being done in response to the latter's requests for answers to specific questions. This output took the form of a steady stream of memoranda, staff analyses, and fact sheets, often furnished on short notice in response to urgent requests. The analytic environment was turbulent and noisy, but this served to generate a real sense of urgency and relevance.



(U) Any written work having its roots in ten years of full-time effort and taking an additional 2½ years of spare time to write owes much to many people. Unfortunately, I cannot hope to acknowledge *all* the debts, but I would like to start with the late James W. Johnson, an operations research veteran of three wars, who told me in Vietnam in 1963 that we had to start looking for patterns if we were ever to understand what was going on. Alfred Schwartz, working with painstaking thoroughness in Washington, later found amazingly precise and stable patterns in Viet Cong and North Vietnamese combat actions, and thus encouraged me to stay the course and keep searching.

(U) None of this work would have been done without the incredibly able leadership of Alain Enthoven, Ivan Selin, Gardiner Tucker, Victor K. Heyman, Philip A. Odeen, and Clay McManaway, all of whom fostered a spirit of free inquiry despite the problems it brought them and imposed very tough standards of performance on those of us engaged in the undertaking. Some of my compatriots who made notable contributions to the analyses presented here are (in no particular order) Lt. Col. Watha J. Eddins, USA, Dr. James Blaker, Col. Dale Vesser, USA, Mr. Frederick Leutner, Lt. Col. Matthew P. Caulfield, USMC, Mrs. Sylvia Bazala (who was in Vietnam during the traumatic events of 1975), and Maj. James Boginis, USA, who is no longer in service.

(U) As to the writing of this book, it would not have been done without the encouragement of Robert W. Komer, Raymond Tanter, James Blaker, and Alexander Tachmindji, who were kind enough to struggle through the initial manuscript and provide many invaluable ideas, comments, and suggestions for improving it.

(U) While it is true that this book would not have been written without the contributions of all the people mentioned above, as well as countless others who gathered data, made reports to Washington, furnished computer support etc. over the years, I am fully and solely responsible for everything said in the pages that follow.

(U) Having written this volume, I come to the conclusion that no one can write a book without the full support and encouragement of his family. Certainly, *I* never could have. So I dedicate this work to Ginny, Tina, John, and Jim, who make life such a wondrous adventure.

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PART ONE  
SOME BASIC PATTERNS

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## Chapter I

### Need for Quantitative Analysis in a War Without Fronts

The longest war in our history, it was the most reported and most visible to the public—but the least understood.

The public was also confused because it was impossible to follow the war by simple lines on a map as in other wars.<sup>(1)</sup>

*Gen. W. C. Westmoreland, U.S. Army (Ret.)*

In no other war have we been deluged by so many tidbits of information, for we have been accustomed to an orderliness associated with established battlelines. Here, though, we have had to make our decisions based not upon enemy regimental course of action, but rather upon the isolated actions of Communist squad-sized elements.<sup>(2)</sup>

*Maj. Gen. Harris B. Hollis, U.S. Army*

(U) War, General Sherman once observed, is hell. He might reasonably have added that war, at the very least, is confusing. Lack of knowledge of the enemy's intentions, lost messages, misunderstood missions, misdirected supplies, and a plethora of other problems and questions hamper the strategic and tactical commanders in their never-ending quest for final and decisive victory. The tasks of the commander would be so much easier if he could only base his decisions on competent analysis of comprehensive and reliable data dealing with the enemy's mode of operation. But of course the enemy knows this very well, and one of his most important activities is the denial of useful information to his adversary.\*

(U) Thus, much of the commander's attention is directed toward the correction of the first of the problems mentioned above—the lack of knowledge as to the enemy's intentions—and toward an understanding of the enemy's strategy and tactics. Concomitantly, the commander is most anxious as to the status of his own operations: What progress is being made?

(U) In a “conventional” war, such as the two World Wars and the Korean conflict, two main items are needed to monitor the progress of the campaign, and that's about all:

- What is the state of the forces on each side?
- Where is the front, and which way has it been moving?

If “friendly” forces are stronger than “enemy” forces and are pushing the enemy back, then the friendly forces are winning, because the objective in a conventional war is simply to destroy the other side's capability to fight. When the North Koreans pushed the U.S. and South Korean forces down into a small perimeter area around Pusan in 1950, even a child could look at the maps in the newspapers and tell that the U.S.-ROK forces were not doing well.

(U) But the Vietnam War was not a conventional war. It was a highly atomized struggle to influence the population in thousands of villages, a war that was fragmented to the extent that there were few large battles—rather, there were some 3,500 actions per month carried out by the Viet Cong and

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\*References for Part One are on page 795.



the North Vietnamese forces at company level or lower. There were about 35,000 tactical air sorties per month; and 44 provinces, 260 districts, and 11,000 hamlets became involved and played their own parts. The French, having engaged in a similar conflict in the same areas a generation earlier, coined the apt description, applicable equally to their own experience and ours: The Vietnamese wars were both "wars without fronts."

(U) This could explain why the Vietnam War was so difficult to grasp, why the U.S. leadership and public found it so hard to judge real progress and detect important trends and changes. The war *was* different. The fact of the matter is that the United States, eminently prepared to cope with a conventional war, was simply not ready for a war without fronts. There were no "front lines," and our commanders and analysts were at first unable to deal with their absence.

(U) In Vietnam, only one of the sets of data needed to keep track of a war was present, namely, the order-of-battle information for both sides. Other than that, the highly atypical nature of the VC/NVA forces, with their regulars, guerrillas, part-time village defense forces, and politico-military infrastructure, made it quite difficult to assemble and collate valid data on the whole VC/NVA lineup, particularly on the guerrilla forces and the all-important infrastructure. Forces from both sides often operated in the same areas at the same time, and they did this for years. Our commanders and analysts had to have some substitute for the front line if they were to understand the war and how it was going.

(U) The substitute turned out to be a systematic, quantitative analysis of the hundreds, even thousands, of "countless" events occurring in many parts of Vietnam every day. Any given action was seldom important by itself, and at first glance, no patterns were seen. *Analysis, however, revealed persistent patterns and cycles. From these, analysts (even those in Washington) were able to monitor the war with surprising precision by examining trends over time and patterns across space in the forces, the military operations and activities, the casualties, the security of the population, and the economic welfare of the population.*

(U) This type of analysis allowed them to judge the importance of a given event or set of events to

the overall progress of the war. For example, the VC/NVA offensive in the spring of 1970 was greeted in Washington as an escalation of the war by those unfamiliar with the basic trends that had been under way for at least two years. By the end of the first week, our analysts were able to tell the top officials that the 1970 offensive did not signify a major VC/NVA escalation of the war, because it was not as intense as the comparable offensive in 1969, which in turn had been less intense than the Tet offensive in 1968. The pattern of statistics showed that the war as a whole was continuing to wind down, even though an offensive had just been launched. The VC/NVA was going through the motions of its regular offensive, but with less intensity than in the previous year.

(U) Now the quantification of the war is often criticized as being excessive and largely misleading—the body count is a favorite example used to support this criticism. Quantification may indeed have been overdone, but analysis of the key issues certainly was not. Much stress was placed on things like the body count, and this focus did create incentive systems all of its own. But there is a difference between analysis and quantification according to old-style rules of thumb. The problem was that quantification became a huge effort, but analysis remained a trivial one. This is unfortunate—perhaps tragic—because those limited analytic efforts that were undertaken yielded much useful insight into the war and into the prospects for achieving U.S. objectives, given the way the war was being fought.

(U) Much of the analysis that follows is quantitative, so it is appropriate to address the problem of whether statistics from the Vietnam War are good enough to analyze. Sir Josiah Stamp (1880–1941) had a few pertinent words on the subject:

The government are very keen on amassing statistics. They collect them, raise them to the *n*th power, take the cube root and prepare wonderful diagrams. But you must never forget that every one of these figures comes in the first instance from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn pleases.

(U) Perhaps. But the village watchman often pleases to tell the truth, and in any case, he probably reports about the same way most of the time. So one must learn to look for a constant bias in reporting. The individual numbers may not be



completely accurate, but the trends and changes in relationships among them may reveal quite a bit about what is going on in the village and how that village compares with other villages.

(U) This is the way to deal with the Vietnam data, which have been subjected to strong criticism and which have the problems of any data reported by officials whose main job is to operate and manage, not to report. The writer has concluded, after years of working with them,\* that many of the data from Vietnam during the U.S. involvement are good enough for systematic analysis, although their accuracy varies widely.

(U) The difficulty of getting good data from the theater of combat operations is, after all, not unique to the war in Vietnam. Experience in operations research in World War II, in Korea, and later in Vietnam revealed that it is extremely difficult to obtain valid and accurate quantitative data in the field. In World War II, the strongly held opinions regarding the effects of strategic bombing on Germany were subsequently deflated by the strategic bombing survey. Also in World War II, the reported number of successful attacks on submarines was discovered to have been inflated by a factor of about 15, especially prior to 1944. In Korea, as early as Nov. 1, 1950, the officially reported number of tanks destroyed by both air and ground attacks was high by a factor of nine. And again in Korea, the official United Nations reports of "kills" of Chinese Army personnel added up to 2½ times the total number that were actually involved in the fighting.†

(U) A war without fronts, then, generally does not fit neat analytic models, and the Vietnam War was no exception to this. Hence, there was a need to search for empirical regularities, or patterns, in the data. Hypothetical strategic nuclear confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union may fit certain analytic models, but the Vietnam historical case is probably too "messy" for such models.‡

\*Including 3½ years in South Vietnam.

†Interview with James W. Johnson in Vietnam ca. 1964. Mr. Johnson, working for the Research Analysis Corp. and stationed in Vietnam at the time, was an operations analyst with extensive experience in World War II and the Korean War.

‡On the other hand, there were limited aspects of the Vietnam situation that were amenable to analytic modeling.

(U) In addition to the lack of analytic models, another reason to search for patterns is concerned with the relation of patterns to objectives, doctrine, and strategy. One might assume that objectives held, doctrine followed, and decisions made regarding strategy in a conflict would generate certain patterns of behavior. For example, a Bendix study<sup>(3)</sup> suggests that doctrine and decisions regarding Vietnam implied regularities in the occurrence of particular conditions and events. The Bendix approach to the analysis of Vietnam was to search for regularities in the data that could be translated into explicit doctrine or decision rules. Finding geographical stability of fighting by the VC/NVA forces, for instance, may reflect strategy in favor of small-unit actions by independent groups in limited geographical areas.

(U) In this example, as in any attempt to extract meaning from masses of data, the analysis must first of all be systematic. In particular, to understand a war without fronts such as the one in Vietnam, one must analyze three sets of data: the forces, the operations, and the status of the population. We now move on to a consideration of these three in turn.

(U) The *forces* of the other side must be analyzed in painstaking detail through intelligence information. Personnel strength, troop inputs and losses, types of units, and locations must all be studied. In Vietnam this encompassed the VC/NVA force data, casualty data, infiltration and recruitment data, and locations (by province or geographical UTM coordinate) of the combat units down to battalions and companies. The VC/NVA guerrillas, infrastructure, and other secret apparatus were also included, and this, as already indicated, complicated the problems of tracking the order of battle to an extent far beyond previous experience.

(U) From the data, it was possible to draw inferences about the success of the attrition strategy (it wasn't working), the will of the North Vietnamese to persist in carrying on the war (they refilled decimated units year after year), and the ability of VC/NVA forces to operate freely in populated areas (VC/NVA units found it increasingly difficult to operate in certain populated areas).



(U) Our own forces must also be studied in even more detail than those of the enemy, including not only all of the items listed above, but also the equipment status of our units, their estimated combat capabilities, desertion rates, and quality of leadership, the ratios of combat to support units, and so on. Since the United States was supplying the RVNAF forces in Vietnam, special efforts were needed to make sure the Americans were constantly up to date in their knowledge of the RVNAF's real strength, equipment, and performance.

(U) From a detailed knowledge of the Allied forces in Vietnam it was possible to draw inferences about the prospects for success of the attrition strategy, about the prospects of improving the RVNAF to the point where the United States could withdraw, and about expected casualty rates. Desertion rates gave some clues about troop morale. Calculation of the proportion of forces available for combat (as opposed to support), revealed much about Allied combat capabilities and about prospects for providing security to the population in the countryside.

(U) The enemy's *operations* must be recorded in detail, including a separate report of each action or incident, giving the date, time, location (UTM map coordinate), estimated type and size of force (for both sides), nature of action (indirect fire, assault, etc.), enemy combat deaths, the combat deaths and wounded by type of force and nationality for our own side (Regional Force, U.S. military, etc.), and any other items of particular interest (mortar rounds fired, etc.). This can all be reported in two or three sentences. Such reporting is essential, because when the individual reports are plotted by hand or put into a computer to search for patterns, it's surprising what a good analyst can learn about the enemy's objectives and style of operation.

(U) From the patterns revealed by the enemy's operations, it is possible to draw a wide variety of inferences about his objectives, strategies, tactics, and strength for comparison with other sources of data about these facets of his effort (captured documents, prisoner interrogations, etc.). In Vietnam, for example, VC/NVA documents that were captured called for killing more Americans to erode support for the war. An analysis of targeting

in the VC/NVA operations clearly showed an increasing effort—successful, one should note—to kill more Americans in actions initiated by the VC/NVA. The types of operations and their intensity in given locations revealed clues to the strength and composition of the VC/NVA forces in those areas. For example, surmised shortages of ammunition could be, and were, reflected in the fewer mortar rounds that were fired during indirect attacks by fire.

(U) The operations of our own forces required the same type of reports as those concerned with the enemy, except that now air and other support operations had to be added. Each combat action needed to be reported, not just the overall operation. Ironically, the U.S. ground forces, except for the Marines in Military Region 1, did not do a very good job of this. It is very difficult to describe the pattern of U.S. ground actions in Military Region 3 except in broad terms, for example, without digging through a great deal of narrative material.

(U) Since a war without fronts is a struggle to gain the support of the *population*—particularly in rural areas—it is critically important to know the size of the population, where its members live, what ethnic groups are present, and how well off it is in terms of security *and* standard of living. Indicators of how much support each side has and from what portions of the population this support emanates also must be developed and monitored carefully. From these data, if reported with reasonable accuracy, it is possible to track progress toward the ultimate objective in a war without fronts—that is, toward acquiring the wholehearted support of the people, which tends to leave the enemy without a basis for successful operation. If there is no progress, then this too can be noted.

(U) Most of the items related to forces, operations, and population were reported fairly well. Reports of individual VC/NVA incidents and South Vietnamese ground combat actions are available in computerized form from 1963 through 1972. Reports of individual air strikes began in 1965. The pacification officials did a particularly thorough job of systematic reporting starting in 1967, with HES (Hamlet Evaluation System) and other large computerized reporting systems providing consistent coverage of a wide variety of



pacification problems related to the status of the South Vietnamese population.

(U) There was no shortage of data from Vietnam for analysis. On the contrary, there probably were more than was needed for analytical purposes, and it took quite a while to sort through them, determine the key statistics, and try to figure out what they meant. *Vietnam was an unusually statisticized war, precisely because everyone was groping for understanding.* Most of the data were developed primarily for the management of complex programs, not for analysis, and the analysts worked from a stream of operational and management reports, not from data collected specifically for analysis. This also characterizes the data presented in this book: Almost all of the information came from reports prepared for purposes other than analysis.

(U) The sources of data used here include cables, narrative reports, statistical reports, letters, computer printouts, computer tapes, maps, data plotted on maps, field trips, interviews, etc., covering many facets of the forces (including casualties), operations, and status of the population in South Vietnam. All of the data are from Vietnam, mostly from MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) and its subordinate commands. None of the data originated in Washington.

(U) The data are presented here primarily in the form of time-series statistical tables, showing patterns across time and space, along with a few maps showing patterns across space. The data have not been transformed into graphs, figures, etc., because of the limited space available and also because of a desire to make the raw data available to other analysts.

(U) In sum, a great deal of information of varying validity and consistency was available, the problem being to figure out how to analyze it without getting lost in the numbers. Consequently, the analysts developed a six-step process to deal with the problem.

(U) The first step was to determine the question, problem, or hypothesis that needed to be examined. This had to be done carefully so as to focus the problem as sharply as possible before plunging into the large amounts of available data. It was

quickly learned not to waste time wandering through large bodies of data on statistical fishing expeditions, since these were seldom productive and they consumed too much time.

(U) After the problem or question was stated, the second step was to see what the statistics said about it. First, it was necessary to decide what data were relevant to the problem and assemble them in a systematic way from the messages, reports, statistical tables, and computer files that constituted the sources used. After they were assembled, the data were then applied to the problem in a search for patterns in the form of trends, levels, locations, and mixes. (Time series data were used in most of the analysis.) A statistical finding or set of findings was the result.

(U) The third step was to take a close look at the statistical finding of step two to see if it made common sense. Did it confirm or fit the perceptions of experienced observers? If it did, it was used without further ado. If it did not, then this was taken as an indication that either a mistake had been made or an exciting finding had been discovered. In either case, the calculations were rechecked and another closer look was taken in an attempt to confirm the accuracy of the basic data. If the finding survived this scrutiny, it became necessary to go through a fourth, and possibly fifth, step before publishing, which would be the sixth step.

(U) The fourth step was to check cables, reports, intelligence, and other narrative material in search of an explanation for the odd finding.

(U) If that didn't furnish an explanation, then it was necessary either to travel to Vietnam (step five) to have a look at the situation on the ground, or to talk to people who had been involved in the situation—for example, to military commanders or pacification advisors who were there. This step was the most time consuming, but it always resolved the problem.

(U) Step six was to publish the finding, always including a caveat, where necessary, that it was the result of a preliminary analysis and that comments and rebuttals would be welcomed. (Defense analysts received a profusion of both.) Also, the right was reserved to say next month that what



had been said this month was wrong, which occasionally turned out to be the unfortunate case. The rule was that we should never try to defend yesterday's mistake.

(U) The six steps didn't necessarily occur in sequence, because our analysts were always reading reports and cables and maintaining contact with people who were in or had come from the war area. Thus, the various steps often occurred simultaneously.

(U) Probably the most dramatic case in which the steps proceeded rigorously in sequence began with a statistical finding that the VC/NVA forces in Vietnam had more influence over fluctuations in casualty rates than the Allied forces did (see Chapter IX). Occurring at a time of massive U.S. presence and high operating rates, the finding ran counter to the conventional wisdom: It didn't make "sense." The data checked out all right, but the narrative reports gave no explanation. A detailed study of the combat actions, plus interviews with S.L.A. Marshall and several U.S. combat commanders, finally suggested that the VC/NVA controlled its own casualties because more of its troops (and those of the Allies) were killed when the VC/NVA decided to stand and fight. If it chose to run, the casualties were low on both sides. And when the VC/NVA did choose to fight, it was usually dug-in and well hidden, taking the Allied forces by surprise and firing first. These findings were published along with a request for comments, and after some controversy they were eventually accepted as correct by the U.S. military and civilian officials involved in the Vietnam war.

(U) The basic rule for drawing inferences from the data presented in the following chapters is: The less accurate the data are, the larger the differences must be to draw a valid inference, and vice versa. For example, data on VC/NVA forces, casualties, and operations tend to be less accurate than similar data for the Allied forces, so the inferences to be drawn from the VC/NVA data are limited to those that result from large differences. On the other hand, the data dealing with U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam are quite accurate, and inferences are drawn from relatively small differences.

(U) Few tests of statistical significance were carried out on the data presented in this book, and none are presented in the text. Instead, intuition and experience were relied upon for deciding when differences were large enough to warrant an inference. Extensive interviews, reading, and personal observation of the war while in Vietnam for 3½ years and later from the United States for another nine years are the basis for the judgments applied to the data to yield inferences.

(U) A final aspect of this section on methodology and inference is concerned with the *validity* and *reliability* of data. One meaning of validity has to do with the extent to which indicators actually measure the phenomena under investigation. For example, does the PAAS (Pacification Attitude Analysis System) yield valid indicators of Vietnamese attitudes toward such things as peace and security?

(U) One way of enhancing the validity of indicators is to have multiple bases for drawing an inference from the indicator to the concept. Indeed, this manuscript uses multiple streams of evidence to increase the validity of inferences to concepts under investigation. For example, Chapters XV and XIII deal with Vietnamese attitudes toward the war and population security measurement, respectively.

(U) Chapter XV reports the convergence of an official JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office) 1965 survey and a Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) 1966-67 unofficial survey. The official and the unofficial surveys, the latter being carried out without the knowledge of the U.S. Government, converged on the finding of an overwhelming preference being given by the Vietnamese to economic over military goals in the mid-1960's. With the increase in combat after 1967, there is a corresponding change in emphasis in favor of security over economic goals, as demonstrated in an analysis of PAAS dated from 1969 to 1973. In fact, the manuscript shows convergence of patterns from PAAS survey data and patterns in military-event data from the SEAPRS (Southeast Asia Province Reports System) file. Such convergence may be evidence of the validity of both data files.



(U) In Chapter XIII, the study again utilizes data from different files and demonstrates convergence in drawing an inference to a concept. Judgment-derived HES (Hamlet Evaluation System) data correlate closely with aggregate data on VC/NVA incidents. If the HES is a valid indicator of security, one expects HES scores to correlate with security as indexed in some independent manner, such as by the VC/NVA incident file, which indeed they do.

(U) Finally, HES and PAAS are compared in Chapter XIII, which finds that PAAS is more pessimistic than HES regarding security. The chapter then goes on to conclude that the data (from both HES and PAAS) all combine to suggest the possibility of gaining some notion of how secure, or how well under control, the population is, but this all depends upon how security and control are defined.

(U) Thus, the basic approach to validity here is to address data based on (1) reports of events (for example, VC/NVA incidents), (2) judgment (for example, HES), and (3) surveys (for example, PAAS) and compare streams of evidence about a

concept to see if they converge so as to support a given inference.

(U) *Reliability* refers to (1) the consistency in coding or reporting of one coder or reporter at several points in time or among several coders or reporters at one point in time and (2) the extent to which the reported values correspond to true values. With respect to reliability, we have already acknowledged in this chapter that if our purpose is to discover trends and basic patterns, then this makes fewer demands on the reliability of the data. That is, if one is interested in comparing patterns across time or space, then the data can be less reliable than if one's purpose was to make statements about a single month or single province.

(U) The data from Vietnam are considered to be sufficiently reliable for the uses to which they were put in this manuscript. They were not invented by a computer, but are based on thousands of repeated on-the-ground observations over periods of years. To repeat, the basic rule here is that drawing inferences from less reliable data requires larger differences than doing so from more reliable data.



## Chapter II

### Intensity and Locale of the Fighting

(U) Before moving on to the details of the war, it is necessary to describe three basic patterns that serve as a backdrop for everything to come:

- The intensity of combat in each year from 1964 to 1972,
- The annual cycle of combat, and
- The locations of the heaviest fighting.

(U) In a war without fronts, these factors are significant, because such wars are so different from conventional conflicts. In a "normal" war everyone knows where the big battles occurred and what their intensities were, but the war in Vietnam had to be pieced together through quantitative analysis. At first glance, it seemed simply that small battles were occurring all over the country at all times of the year; but systematic analysis revealed important patterns, which gave clues to VC/NVA strengths and intentions. Equally important, the patterns took on significance because of the slow, grinding attrition strategies pursued by both sides. Milestone events were rare, and the war had to be tracked by following the slowly developing patterns of events. Indeed, the progress of the U.S. attrition strategy could be measured realistically only in this manner.

#### THE INTENSITY OF COMBAT

(U) The best way to measure the intensity of combat in a war without fronts is to examine the levels and fluctuations of combat deaths among friendly forces. This type of data is among the

most accurate reported from the war in Vietnam, and by their very nature, they reflect the tempo of the fighting. To seek converging evidence, the analysis here also looks at the fluctuations in the estimates of VC/NVA combat deaths.

(U) Table 1 and Fig. 1 show the basic trend. *Combat intensity in Vietnam grew every year until 1968, after which it declined until 1972, when the North Vietnamese launched a final round of intense fighting to gain territory before signing the cease fire agreement in January 1973.* The Allied and VC/NVA combat death figures both fit the pattern exactly, as do the numbers of VC/NVA military forces and VC/NVA battalion-size attacks. The pattern seems self-evident now, but in 1969–71 great concern over "escalation" of the war was expressed each time the VC/NVA opened its winter-spring campaign. Fortunately, analysts were able to point out quickly each time that the new campaign opened on a weaker plane than that of the year before. In 1972, the real escalation was obvious.

#### THE ANNUAL CYCLE OF COMBAT

(U) Figure 2 and Table 2 suggest that the basic yearly combat cycle of the Vietnam war during the American involvement went somewhat as follows. The heaviest fighting each year always occurred during the period from February through June. On the average, it was the month of May that produced the year's highest number of Allied combat deaths, followed by April, February, March, and June. (Combat deaths in June were

TABLE 1. The combat intensity peaked in 1968 and 1972. (Table unclassified.)

In Thousands	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Allied Combat Deaths a/ (U)	8	13	18	23	43	32	28	25	40
VC/NVA Combat Deaths (U)	17	35	55	88	181	157	104	98	132

Source: Table 6, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, (Comptroller), April 1973, pp. 1-9.

a/RVNAF-US-3rd Nation.

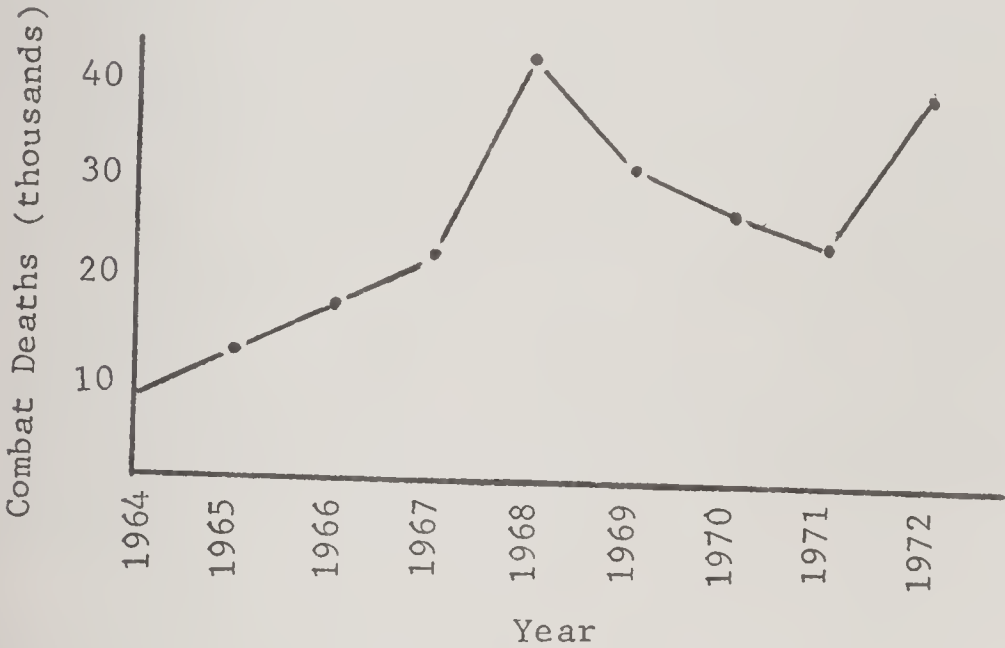


Figure 1. Combat intensity peaked in 1968 and 1972 (Figure unclassified.)

lower than in May in six of the seven years analyzed, because the VC/NVA winter-spring offensive usually ended during June.) July was always a month of relative lull, with Allied combat deaths always being fewer than those in June; and in five of the seven years studied the July deaths were also fewer than those of August. In August-September the intensity of combat went up again, but the period from October through January was normally quiet. October, on the average, produced the fewest combat deaths among the Allies, and it was always a month of comparative lull. Allied combat deaths were below those in September during every year studied, while in five of the seven years the October deaths were also below those in November.

(U) In summary, the basic pattern consisted of heavy fighting from February through June, a lull in July, renewed combat in August and September, a lull in October, and relatively low activity until February, when the cycle started all over again.

TABLE 2. The cycle of Allied combat deaths in South Vietnam; monthly averages for 1966 through 1972. (Table unclassified.)

Jan - Dec	Combat Cycle
Jan 2177	Feb 2864
Feb 2864	Mar 2871
Mar 2871	Apr 2919
Apr 2919	May 3427
May 3427	Jun 2752
Jun 2752	Jul 2097
Jul 2097	Aug 2361
Aug 2361	Sep 2300
Sep 2300	Oct 1880
Oct 1880	Nov 1936
Nov 1936	Dec 2011
Dec 2011	Jan 2177

By Quarter	By Combat Cycle
Jan-Mar 2637	Feb-Jun 2967
Apr-Jun 3032	Jul 2097
Jul-Sep 2253	Aug-Sep 2330
Oct-Dec 1942	Oct-Jan 2001

Source: Averages calculated from statistics in Table 6, Statistics on Southeast Asia, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), March 25, 1971 through January 17, 1973, pp. 1-7.

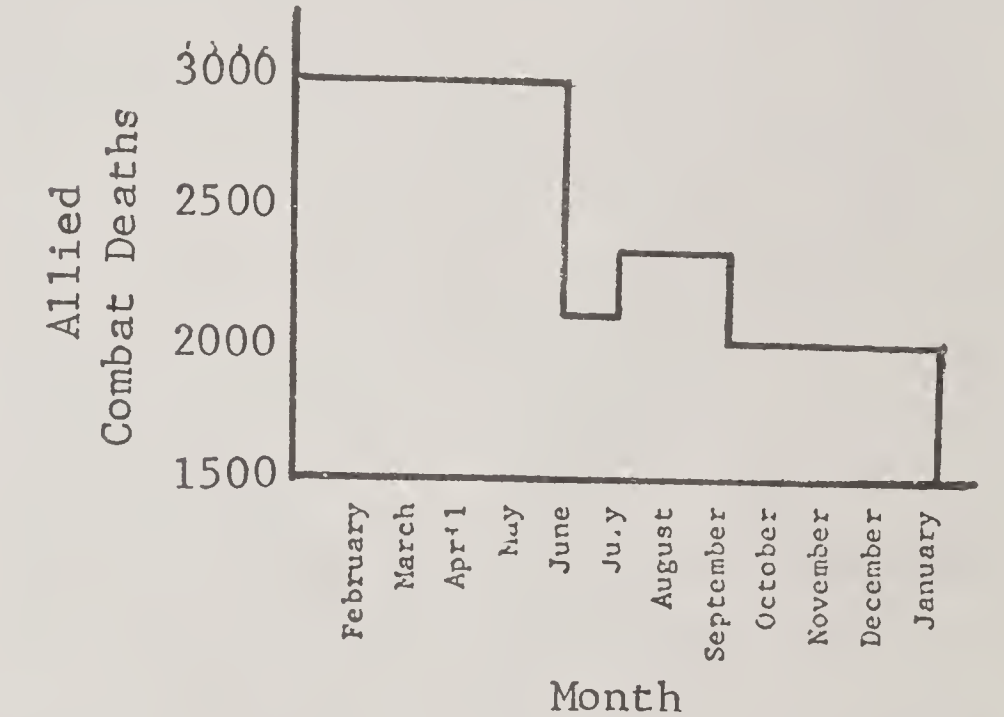


Figure 2. The heaviest fighting always occurred during the first half of the year. (Figure unclassified.)

(U) A basic determinant of the cycle was the weather. In the northern part of South Vietnam (Military Region 1) the rainy season extends from September through January. In the southern part of the country and in the Laos panhandle (where the infiltration roads and trails were located) it extends approximately from May through September. The rain closed down the NVA infiltration routes in Laos and made it difficult for the North Vietnamese to continue their major offensive in the south. The terrain got progressively worse as they drew down men and supplies that couldn't be replaced until the infiltration corridors reopened in October.



TABLE 3. *Most Communist offensives occurred during the dry season (September 1952–July 1954). Calculated from data found in B. Fall's The Two Vietnams; New York: Praeger, 1966, page 123. (Table unclassified.)*

		Number of Offensives Underway
Dry Season	October (1952-53)	1
	November (1952-53)	2
	December (1952-53)	3
	January (1953-54)	2
	February (1953-54)	3
	March (1953-54)	4
	April (1953-54)	4
Subtotal - 19		
Rainy Season	May (1953-54)	3
	June (1953-54)	1
	July (1953-54)	1
	August (1943)	0
	September (1952-53)	2
Subtotal - 7		

(U) *Thus, the best time to launch a major VC/NVA offensive was between January and April, when all of South Vietnam has a dry season, and that is actually when all the major offensives started.*

(U) The cycle can be explained in the following manner. By October of each year, the VC/NVA troop strength and supplies were low. The rain stopped in Laos, and the infiltration of men and supplies for the winter-spring offensive began. At some point during the time from February to April, the VC/NVA had accumulated enough troops and placed enough supplies in position to begin its major offensive of the year. The infiltration continued, but it gradually dwindled as the rains started again in Laos and the VC/NVA went into the final phase of its offensive, ending it in June. By July the offensive was finished and infiltration through Laos had slowed to a trickle. At this point, much of the terrain in the southern part of South Vietnam was under water. By mid-August the VC/NVA had regrouped well enough to launch a brief summer offensive, and this lasted into September, at which time the rains started once again in the northern part of South Vietnam. Finally, October brought the low point, and the cycle would start all over again: In November, infiltrators and trucks would be sighted coming down the trails in Laos and the buildup for the following year's winter-spring offensive would be under way.

(U) This cycle is important because it lends perspective to analysis of the tempo of combat. If one knows that May is usually the toughest month of the year, it's easier to remain calm when

casualties rise above April's levels. By the same token, if it is known that the infiltration cycle always starts up again in October–November, then there is no surprise when fresh North Vietnamese troops are suddenly reported heading down the trails to South Vietnam. *Instead, the focus in both cases is on the level of activity and how it compares with similar periods of previous years.* Trends can be tracked accurately in this manner, if the data are reasonably reliable.

(U) As a matter of interest, and to illustrate the strength and persistence of the annual cycle, it is appropriate to point out that the cycle was operating in the French Indochina War (1946–54). This should be no surprise, since the weather cycle did not change. In writing about that war, Edgar O'Ballance speaks of the campaigning season: "During the 'campaigning' season of 1949–50, the French military command let things slide."<sup>(4)</sup> And, "When the rains ended in late September 1951, the campaigning season opened cautiously."<sup>(5)</sup> Finally, ". . . by October 1952, the end of the rainy season. General Salan was not able to muster any appreciable extra numbers of French troops for offensive operations."<sup>(6)</sup>

(U) The Communist offensives from September 1952 through July 1954 seem to fit the general dry-season–wet-season cycle well. Table 3 collapses the two years into one 12-month cycle and shows the number of offensives under way during a given month. Viet Minh offensive activity peaked during the dry season; 19 of the 26 "offensive months" were dry season months. The battle at Dien Bien Phu was fought from March 13 to May 7, 1954, during the annual peak of the combat cycle.

#### WHERE DID MOST OF THE FIGHTING OCCUR?

(U) In viewing the war in Vietnam, there is a common tendency to assume that all parts of the country are similar and that the fighting is evenly distributed throughout the country. That this is not the case is shown by Table 4 and Fig. 3. *The heaviest fighting tended to be highly localized.*

(U) Allied combat deaths in South Vietnam were particularly heavy in a few provinces, suggesting that combat was much more intense there than in other areas. *In the overall period from 1967 through*



TABLE 4. Five provinces accounted for one-third of the Allied combat deaths (1962 through 1972). (Table unclassified.)

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total Period	
Five Provinces							%	Rank
Were in Top Ten Every Year:							%	Rank
Quang Tri (MR-1)	12	10	5	6	7	12	9	1
Quang Nam (MR-1)	8	10	8	6	6	6	8	2
Binh Dinh (MR-2)	6	4	5	8	9	6	6	3
Quang Ngai (MR-1)	7	4	6	5	4	5	5	5
Dinh Tuong (MR-4)	4	5	6	5	5	4	5	6
% of Total	37%	33%	30%	30%	31%	33%	33%	-
Five Additional Provinces With Very High Combat Death Rates:								
Tay Ninh (MR-3)	3	6	10	7	4	1	5	4
Thua Thien (MR-1)	5	4	2	4	2	3	4	7
Kontum (MR-2)	4	2	4	3	3	5	3	8
Kien Hoa (MR-1)	2	2	3	4	5	4	3	9
Quang Tin (MR-1)	4	2	4	4	3	2	3	10
% of Total	18%	16%	23%	22%	17%	15%	18%	-
Ten Provinces -								
Total % of Country-Wide Friendly Combat Deaths	55%	49%	53%	52%	48%	48%	51%	

Source: Southeast Asia Province Computer File, National Military Command Systems Support Center, Department of Defense.



Figure 3. Percentage of combat deaths among friendly troops, by province, 1967-72. (Figure unclassified.)



Figure 4. Territory held by the Viet Minh after Dien Bien Phu. (Figure unclassified.)

1972, five provinces accounted for a third of the Allied combat deaths, and four of them are in the northern part of the country. The pattern is a stable one. All five provinces ranked among the top ten and accounted for roughly a third of the deaths in each year. Stated another way, combat in the five top provinces was almost four times as intense as it was in the other 39 provinces.

(U) The top ten provinces accounted for half of the Allied combat deaths. The other 34 accounted for the remainder. All five provinces of Military Region 1 are among the top ten, as are Kontum and Binh Dinh in Military Region 2. The other three provinces are farther south, Tay Ninh in Military Region 3 and Dinh Tuong and Kien Hoa in Military Region 4. The French, when operating





Figure 5. Viet Minh deployment, Sept. 30, 1953. (Figure unclassified.)

in South Vietnam, also had their worst troubles in these areas.\*

(U) The most intense fighting of the French Indochina War took place in North Vietnam, but the northern areas of South Vietnam also saw heavy combat. The most southern part of South Vietnam was quieter, but there were definite pockets of Viet Minh strength. Perhaps the best portrayal of the situation, in the absence of statistics, is shown in the maps of Figs. 4 and 5.

\*(U) A study by the Bendix Corporation for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency classifies the provinces of South Vietnam into a two-dimensional structure of mutually exclusive province clusters, based on a complex analysis of 11 variables describing total war deaths, various categories of personnel strengths, and activities. The two dimensions are labeled "regular force" and "territorial force" and are further subdivided into "high" and "low" clusters. The eight-province cluster labeled "high regular force" includes eight of the provinces in the "top ten" cited above. The exceptions, Dinh Tuong and Kien Hoa provinces, are labeled "high territorial force" in the Bendix analysis. Thus, both analyses agree that the war was intense in the ten provinces; see Ref. 7.

(U) Figure 4<sup>(8)</sup> shows the territory held by the Viet Minh after Dien Bien Phu fell in 1954. Except for the cities of Hue, Tourane (now Danang), and Quang Tri, the area of most intense fighting during the American involvement was under Viet Minh control, although the latter were not able to gain title to it at the Geneva Conference. Farther south, the Viet Minh held the northern part of Tay Ninh province, the Plain of "Joncs" (Reeds), Camau (at the southern tip of the country), and other pockets of territory.

(U) Figure 5<sup>(9)</sup> shows the estimated deployment of the Viet Minh battalions on Sept. 30, 1953. The pattern is similar: a heavy concentration of *regular* battalions in the north, reaching down into South Vietnam's Military Region 2, with a lighter concentration of *regional* battalions farther south.

(U) In discussing their worst trouble spots, the French noted that:<sup>(10)</sup>

What we have observed in Indochina confirms a fact already known in our African possessions: There exists a permanence or continuity in the centers of unrest. History and geography reveal that certain regions are traditional cradles of insurgent movements, and these later serve as preferred areas for the guerrillas.

It is in the provinces where the population has always shown itself to be proud, bold, and independent that the revolt has taken on the most acute and intense forms. . . . It is striking to compare some recent engagements with the history of certain battles which occurred during the conquest. The events were often the same and even happened at the same places.

It should be no surprise that the same areas continued to be troublesome to the South Vietnamese and Americans.

## CONCLUSION

(U) In summary, the three basic patterns of the war without fronts in South Vietnam consisted of the following:

- An increase in combat every year from 1964 to a peak in 1968, followed by a period of declining intensity each year until 1972, when the VC/NVA launched its offensive in preparation for the cease-fire agreement and combat peaked again.
- An annual cycle of combat, in which the heaviest fighting took place during the first

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half of each year, followed by a lull during the second half.

- A stable concentration of the most intense combat in the northern part of South Vietnam and in three provinces farther south. Activity elsewhere in the country was much lower.

These patterns serve as a basic background to much of what follows, and they need to be kept in mind constantly as the details of the war are described.

(U) Anyone trying to understand a war without fronts would be wise to determine the history of combat intensity, check the weather cycle, and carefully examine whether the fighting historically was concentrated in a few areas. The history of the intensity of combat will indicate whether the war is building up or winding down and will

enable an observer to "calibrate" the war's intensity for comparisons within itself over periods of time and with similar wars elsewhere (for example, South Vietnam in comparison with Cambodia). If there is a cycle of combat, it will be possible to predict when the most intense fighting and the lulls can be expected, which will serve as a useful planning aid. Close monitoring of the cycle will provide an accurate gauge of the trends and highlight any significant changes in the foe's timing, which in turn may give clues to his intentions and the state of his forces. If the fighting is concentrated in a few areas, then plans can be developed accordingly and any changes in the patterns can be monitored, even if the changes occur extremely slowly, as they so often do in a war without fronts.



## Chapter III

### What Were the Basic Patterns of Resource Allocation?

(U) Besides the tragic cost in lives, the Vietnam War was enormously costly to the United States in terms of resources, partly because firepower was used to prevent casualties.\* According to the official Department of Defense estimates, the Vietnam War cost \$112 billion through June 1974.\*\* These are not even the full costs to the Department, but the incremental costs (that is, the expenditures over and above what would have been spent on the forces in peacetime).

(U) Why was it so expensive? The answer lies in the way the war was fought—American style, with the most expensive forces available.† An examination of resource allocation in the fiscal years 1969–71 shows why the war cost so much, and the pattern of spending reveals much about how the war was fought: essentially in a conventional style that was ill-suited to the successful prosecution of a war without fronts. This happened because large U.S. (and GVN) organizations became involved in the war and tended to play out their institutional repertoires instead of adjusting in major ways to meet the situations they faced. The pattern of resource allocations reflected this phenomenon.‡

#### A PROGRAM BUDGET FOR THE WAR

(U) To determine where an organization or a

\*Most of the material in this chapter is from Refs. 11 and 12.

\*\*\$145 billion in 1974 dollars.

†In 1969, operating a South Vietnamese division cost about one-twentieth as much as operating a U.S. division.

‡For a full discussion of this facet of the war effort, see Ref. 13.

nation really puts its emphasis, try to figure out where its money goes. Since money is the best common measure of resource inputs, how is it spent? This, more than statements of objectives or purposes, will suggest where the emphasis lies and what is considered to be most important. A good way to do this is to develop a program budget that looks carefully at *what* the money is to be spent for in terms of outputs and only secondarily at who is going to spend it. A conventional budget looks primarily at *who* is going to spend the money in terms of inputs.

(U) As an example of what this difference means in the Department of Defense, the program budget is structured in broad functional categories such as strategic forces, general-purpose forces, mobility forces, logistics, reserve forces, etc. It includes ground, naval, and air forces in each of the categories, but the emphasis is on how much is to be spent for each of the major defense programs. The conventional budget in Defense focuses on the military services in terms of inputs: military personnel, operations and maintenance, procurement, etc.

(U) In 1970, U.S. Government agencies directly involved with the Vietnam War collected detailed cost data for the fiscal years 1968–71 in a comprehensive program budget framework. Information was obtained in South Vietnam and from overseas bases to provide detail and to verify the use of resources consumed by operating units. Interviews with operations officers at military region and division level in South Vietnam, together with MACV operational data, provided the basis for



TABLE 5. Program budget cost of Vietnam activities, fiscal 1969-71, in billions of U.S. dollars. (Table classified Confidential.)

	FY 69	FY 70	FY 71	% Change
	(C)	(C)	(C)	FY 69-71 a/
				(U)
Military Operations/Investment				
U.S.	17.6	14.8	11.3	-36
Vietnamese	2.6	3.1	3.8	+46
Third Country	.5	NA	.5	0
Total	20.7		15.6	-25
Civil Operations/Investment				
U.S.	.4	NA	.3	-16
GVN	.4	NA	.5	+15
Total	.8		.8	0
Grand Total	21.5		16.4	-24
Cost to U.S.	20.4		14.7	-28
Cost to GVN	1.0		1.6	+52
Cost to Third Countries	.1		.1	+ 4
Total	21.5		16.4	-24

NA = not available.

a/ Percentages based on unrounded dollar amounts.

Source: "Where the Money Went", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, August-October 1971, p. 28.

allocating costs to the major functions that U.S., South Vietnamese, and third-country forces performed in the war.

(U) The program budget has some limitations. First, it is not directly comparable to official Department of Defense estimates of the cost of the war, and it is used only to show resource allocations. Second, the project ended before fiscal 1968 cost estimates for the Army and fiscal 1968 and 1970 civil cost estimates were completed. (The fiscal 1968 data were so incomplete that they are not shown here.)<sup>(14)</sup> Third, it is impossible to obtain program budget figures for this analysis for fiscal 1972 or later. The program budget was a one-time effort, primarily because of the substantial collection and analysis needed to produce it.

(U) The program budget shows the *full cost* of resources *expended* in South Vietnam by the Allies, as well as of operations and programs outside of the country but directly related to Vietnam. The total costs in the program budget are less than other estimates of the cost of the war, because they do not include support costs in the continental United States. (The major exclusions are the costs of training U.S. forces in the United States, the costs of transporting equipment and supplies to Vietnam, and the costs of maintaining the rotational manpower base.) Also, some resources, budgeted for the war in a given fiscal year, may actually be expended elsewhere or in another fiscal year, so *the program budget is not*

TABLE 6. Cost of U.S./RVNAF forces, fiscal 1969-71. (Table classified Confidential.)

	FY 1969		FY 1971	
	\$ Billions	%	\$ Billions	%
U.S. Forces				
Land Forces	4.6	23	3.7	25
Naval Forces	.4	2	.1	1
Air Forces	9.3	46	5.3	35
General Support	3.3	16	2.2	14
Total	17.6	87	11.3	75
RVNAF				
Regular Land Forces	1.5	7	1.8	12
Territorial Forces	.4	2	.7	4
Naval Forces	*	*	.1	1
Air Forces	.2	1	.3	2
General Support	.5	3	.9	6
Total	2.6	13	3.8	25
Total U.S. & RVNAF				
Land Forces	6.1	30	5.5	37
Territorial Forces	.4	2	.7	4
Naval Forces	.4	2	.2	2
Air Forces	9.5	47	5.6	37
General Support	3.8	19	3.1	20
Grand Total	20.2	100	15.1	100

\* Less than \$.05 billion or .5%.

a/ Percentages based on unrounded dollar amounts.

Source: "Where the Money Went", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, August-October 1971.

*directly compatible with Department of Defense budget figures for fiscal 1969-71.*

THE COSTS

(C) Table 5 shows the total costs to the Allies of the Vietnam War in program budget terms for fiscal 1969-71. It suggests that in fiscal 1969:

- (C) The total program budget cost of U.S., South Vietnamese, and third-nation operations and investment was \$21.5 billion, with 96 percent for military purposes.
- (C) United States military activities cost \$17.6 billion, or 82 percent of the total, while Vietnamese military activities cost only \$2.6 billion (12 percent). Third-country activities cost \$500 million.
- (C) Civil activities cost only \$800 million, or 4 percent of the total.
- (C) The United States paid for most of the Vietnamese and third-country activities.

(C) *By fiscal 1971*, several changes are evident:

- (C) Reductions in U.S. military activities as part of the Vietnamization lowered the annual cost of Allied activities by \$5.1 billion, a reduction of 24 percent from fiscal 1969 (from \$21.5 billion down to \$16.4 billion).



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TABLE 7. *Forces versus activities, fiscal 1969; cost in millions of U.S. dollars. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	Interdiction				Main Force Operations		Territorial Security		Other		Total		
	In-Country		Out-of-Country										
	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	Total
<u>Land Forces</u>													
Army	990	239	2	9	2584	548	143	606	174	67	3893	1469	5362
Marines	3	-	-	-	611	8	107	-	-	-	721	8	729
Territorial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	346	-	26	-	372	372
Total	993	239	2	9	3195	556	250	952	174	93	4614	1849	6463
<u>Naval Forces</u>													
Army	56	4	47	-	217	12	11	29	32	-	363	45	408
<u>Air Forces</u>													
Army	153	-	50	-	1856	-	116	-	102	-	2277	-	2277
Air Force	1341	98	2401	3	736	51	3	-	266	23	4747	175	4922
Navy	29	-	1102	-	34	-	-	-	-	-	1165	-	1165
Marines	56	-	144	-	942	-	-	-	39	-	1181	-	1181
Total	1579	98	3697	3	3568	51	119	-	407	23	9370	175	9545
<u>General Support</u>													
Army	-	-	-	-	1130	112	-	-	916	291	2046	403	2449
Air Force	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	516	40	516	40	556
Navy	-	-	-	-	1	20	-	-	532	13	533	33	566
Marines	-	-	-	-	184	1	-	-	19	1	203	2	205
Territorial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	-	16	-	38	38
Total	-	-	-	-	1315	133	-	22	1983	361	3298	516	3814
<u>TOTAL</u>	2628	341	3746	12	8295	752	380	1003	2596	477	17645	2585	20230

Source: "Where the Money Went," Southeast Asia Analysis Report, August-October 1971, p. 32.

- (C) United States military activities declined \$6.3 billion, from \$17.6 billion to \$11.3 billion.
- (C) During the same period, the costs of South Vietnamese military operations rose nearly 50 percent—up \$1.2 billion—to help fill the gap left by the departing U.S. forces. They reached \$3.8 billion, or 23 percent of the total costs in fiscal 1971, up from 12 percent in fiscal 1969.\*
- (C) Civil activities (\$800 million) and third-country military activities (\$500 million) remained constant.
- (C) The U.S. share of the costs dropped in fiscal 1971. South Vietnamese funding rose by \$600 million between fiscal 1969 and 1971, bringing their share up.

\*The exact percentage share that the United States paid for cannot be calculated from the tables here, because they do not indicate how the counterpart funds (which were liens on South Vietnamese resources) were allocated.

- (C) Table 5 and details not shown here suggest that the United States paid a large part of the third-country costs.

(U) Thus, a look at the program budget suggests that military activities accounted for about 95 percent of the total, with the United States paying for most of the military and civil activities. The impact of Vietnamization is evident in the fiscal 1971 figures, which show the Vietnamese to be absorbing more of the costs than they did in fiscal 1969, before the U.S. withdrawals began.

## ON WHAT FORCES DID WE SPEND THE MOST?

(U) Table 6† shows the costs of U.S. and Vietnamese military forces by type for fiscal 1969 and 1971. In fiscal 1969:

†The details are in Tables 7, 8, and 9.

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TABLE 8. *Forces versus activities, fiscal 1970; cost in millions of U.S. dollars. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	Interdiction				Main Force Operations		Territorial Security		Other		Total		
	In-Country		Out-of-Country										
	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	U.S.	RVNAF	Total
<u>Land Forces</u>													
Army	996	31	11	-	2693	736	174	426	170	55	4044	1248	5292
Marines	5	-	-	-	399	12	61	1	-	-	465	13	478
Territorial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	435	-	99	-	534	534
Total	1001	31	11	-	3092	748	235	862	170	154	4509	1795	6304
<u>Naval Forces</u>													
	66	21	14	-	105	49	15	70	55	-	255	140	395
<u>Air Forces</u>													
Army	225	-	176	-	1187	-	73	-	155	-	1816	-	1816
Air Force	1031	101	1954	13	594	87	1	-	234	45	3814	246	4060
Navy	20	-	771	-	38	-	-	-	-	-	829	-	829
Marines	135	-	126	-	498	-	-	-	36	-	795	-	795
Total	1411	101	3027	13	2317	87	74	-	425	45	7254	246	7500
<u>General Support</u>													
Army	-	-	-	-	1159	611	-	-	696	79	1855	690	2545
Air Force	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	434	91	434	91	525
Navy	-	-	-	-	3	53	-	-	324	26	327	79	406
Marines	-	-	-	-	157	4	-	-	34	2	191	6	197
Territorial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	-	21	-	43	43
Total	-	-	-	-	1319	668	-	22	1485	219	2807	509	3716
TOTAL	2478	153	3052	13	6833	1552	324	954	2138	418	14825	3090	17915

Source: "Where the Money Went," Southeast Asia Analysis Report, August-October 1971, p. 33.

- (C) *Air activities\* cost \$9.5 billion, almost half (47 percent) of the total.* Most of the air costs were for interdiction (\$5.4 billion); in addition, the air forces accounted heavily for main-force operations (\$3.6 billion), almost as much as the share attributed to the land forces (\$3.8 billion).
- (C) Land forces cost \$6.1 billion (30 percent of the total), mostly (\$5 billion) for main-force operations and ground operations along South Vietnam's borders (interdiction). Most of the rest (\$900 million) reportedly was spent for assistance to the territorial forces in security missions (but one informed observer has noted that the regular forces reported in this category often—maybe 50 percent of the time—were simply resting between main-force operations.)
- (C) Territorial forces (\$400 million) and naval forces (\$400 million) make up the rest of the combat costs, each accounting for 2 percent of the total.
- (C) General support, consisting of logistics,

administration, communications, etc. cost \$3.8 billion, or 19 percent of the total.

- (C) In fiscal 1971 the picture is slightly different:
  - (C) The cost of U.S. air activities declined 43 percent, dropping from 47 percent of the total in fiscal 1969 to 35 percent in fiscal 1971.
  - (C) Land-force costs dropped to \$5.5 billion, down \$600 million, to account for 37 percent of the total shown (as opposed to 30 percent in fiscal 1969).
  - (C) Territorial-force costs increased from \$400 million to \$600 million.

(U) In sum, *the money was spent mostly for U.S. air forces and for the regular land forces that carried out main-force operations. Relatively little was spent for territorial security.* Between fiscal 1969 and 1971, the territorial forces showed some gains, but they still received few of the resources that were available.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION BY MAJOR ACTIVITY

(C) The emphasis in fiscal 1969 was on main-force operations and interdiction, which accounted

\*Including all helicopters (combat and support) and the fixed-wing aircraft (C130's, etc.) which moved troops and supplies.



TABLE 9. Forces versus activities, fiscal 1971; cost in millions of U.S. dollars. (Table classified Confidential.)

	<u>Interdiction</u>				<u>Main Force Operations</u>		<u>Territorial Security</u>		<u>Other</u>		<u>Total</u>		
	<u>In-Country</u>		<u>Out-of-Country</u>		<u>U.S.</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>									
<u>Land Forces</u>													
Army	847	146	10	48	2402	821	179	681	77	76	3515	1772	5287
Marines	2	-	-	-	186	13	31	-	-	-	219	13	232
Territorial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	529	-	120	-	649	649
Total	849	146	10	48	2588	834	210	1210	77	196	3734	2434	6168
<u>Naval Forces</u>	37	20	12	1	38	33	5	73	21	-	113	127	240
<u>Air Forces</u>													
Army	160	-	128	-	876	-	52	-	113	-	1329	-	1329
Air Force	549	20	1707	53	502	149	(a)	-	184	88	2942	310	3252
Navy	21	-	669	-	42	-	-	-	-	-	732	-	732
Marines	63	-	57	-	157	-	-	-	12	-	289	-	289
Total	793	20	2561	53	1577	149	52	-	309	88	5292	310	5602
<u>General Support</u>													
Army	-	-	-	-	567	416	-	-	942	248	1509	664	2173
Air Force	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	384	92	384	92	476
Navy	-	-	-	-	7	58	-	-	189	49	196	107	303
Marines	-	-	-	-	90	2	-	-	16	1	106	3	109
Territorial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	21	-	25	25
Total	-	-	-	-	664	476	-	4	1531	411	2195	891	3086
<u>TOTAL</u>	1679	186	2583	102	4867	1492	267	1287	1938	695	11334	3762	15096

<sup>a</sup> Less than \$500,000.

Source: "Where the Money Went," *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*, August-October 1971, p. 34.

for more than 70 percent of the costs. Main-force operations cost \$9 billion, or 42 percent of the \$21.5 billion total program budget. Interdiction operations by air and land forces cost \$6.7 billion, or 31 percent of the total; over half (\$3.7 billion) went to air interdiction outside of the country.

(U) Despite the declining intensity of the war and the changing mix of forces, two-thirds of the money in fiscal 1971 was spent on main-force operations (39 percent) and interdiction (28 percent). Territorial security operations by the South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces still accounted for a small part (2.5 percent) of the costs.

CONCLUSION

(U) *In terms of resources, then, it was a "U.S. war," in which the costs of U.S. forces were immensely higher than those of South Vietnamese forces. As to the type of war, it was, in terms of resource allocation, first and foremost an air war and, second, an attrition campaign on the ground against VC/NVA regular units. Pacification was a very poor third in the priorities.*

(U) It is difficult to separate the pacification expenditures from civil and military outlays (the latter including territorial security), but it is clear that even the greatly expanded pacification program of fiscal 1969-71 received only a small fraction of the U.S.-GVN outlays, even though it was supposed to be a major dimension of the combined effort. For example, in fiscal 1969, artillery support alone cost about five times as much as all of the territorial forces, who benefited little from it.\*

(U) In the words of one high-level participant, "If we had ever realized at all levels where the money really went in relation to what impact it had, it is at least questionable whether the United States would have fought the war the way it did."†

\*Artillery-naval gunfire cost of \$2.07 billion from page 50 of "Where the Money Goes," *SEA Report*, divided by the \$410 million cost of territorial forces shown in Table 7. Of course, since the all-Vietnamese territorial forces are cheap, this could give a misleading impression of their real contribution to the Allied war effort. See Chapter XIV on their comparative effectiveness.

†Personal comment to the author.

## Chapter IV

### Who Were the Forces That Fought the War?

(U) In any war, each combatant must learn as much as he can about the other side's forces, and each spends a lot of time and energy on the effort to do so. The war in Vietnam was of course no exception to this; and so the forces on each side are discussed here, beginning with the VC/NVA and concluding with the Allies.

(U) It is particularly important to develop a meticulous and detailed record of the enemy's forces in a war without fronts. The government's greatest problem is likely to be how to describe, identify, and locate scattered insurgent units who spend much of their time dispersed and in hiding. The insurgent, on the other hand, has to keep track of the government units so that his forces, usually smaller and outgunned, don't get caught by surprise. Since the insurgent units are usually scattered and have great mobility, it is doubly important for the government to maintain a detailed historical analysis of the trends and patterns of the insurgent's movement, so that it can anticipate and head off insurgent actions before they affect the civilian population. To reemphasize: *The insurgent troops won't be lined up behind a front. They'll be scattered and moving in the areas where government forces are present, and they'll be hard to find. Detailed analysis of the sizes, trends, and movements of their units is needed if they are to be kept out of populated areas.*

#### VC/NVA FORCES

##### DIFFICULTY OF PRODUCING THE ESTIMATES

(U) The VC/NVA forces in the Vietnam War were

difficult to count, for several reasons. First, they were structured in a way that was unfamiliar to U.S. analysts, and the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces were often mixed up together. It was difficult to know who to count and how to count them. Should the nebulous "secret self-defense forces" be counted? How about the VC/NVA cadre? What about units outside of South Vietnam who could and did enter at any time? Second, the VC/NVA forces fought differently than units in a conventional war. Most of the combat actions were hit-and-run raids conducted by small VC/NVA units scattered around the country, only a few such actions each year involving as much as a battalion. The VC/NVA units spent most of their time hidden away somewhere, not out fighting. Battalions, for example, usually fought only two or three times a year, and even then they tried to move in secrecy until the moment they attacked. Third, the adoption of an attrition strategy by the United States—"destroy the enemy forces"—complicated the process by making the number of VC/NVA forces a prime measure of success or failure. But if force levels rose, it was difficult to claim success; for awhile, this created resistance to estimates that suggested higher VC/NVA force levels than before. Besides, analysts often disagreed in their estimates of the force levels, and the whole order-of-battle process involved much controversy, many conferences, and lots of compromises.

(U) Finally, as noted in Chapter I, detailed historical analysis is essential to understanding a



war without fronts, and that includes estimates of force levels. Commanders, analysts, and policy makers needed to know what the major VC/NVA force trends were. Until 1968, the estimates depended mostly on prisoner interrogations and captured documents, and there were time lags in updating them. For example, a document captured in June might indicate that a given VC/NVA unit was twice as large in the previous January as the Allies had thought. This meant that not only did the intelligence analysts have to update the current estimate; they also had to go back and correct the listing for last January and the intervening four months so as to show the correct force-level trend. Having been trained in the concept that current estimates are sufficient (that's all that is needed in a conventional war), they were reluctant to retrogress in this way, and they had to be prodded to do so. Eventually, the employment of additional sources of intelligence from 1968 onward eliminated some of this need for retrospective adjustments.

(U) The VC/NVA's highly unconventional force structure had four basic components: combat forces, administrative service forces, irregulars, and the VC/NVA politico-military infrastructure.<sup>(15)</sup>

(U) The combat forces consisted of the VC/NVA maneuver and combat support units. Of these, the maneuver units comprised infantry, armor, security, sapper, and reconnaissance elements at the platoon level and upward. The combat support units comprised the fire support companies, and battalions, as well as the air defense and technical service battalions.

(U) Administrative service personnel consisted of the military staffs of COSVN (the Central Office for South Vietnam)\* and the VC/NVA headquarters at the military region, military sub-region, province, and district levels, as well as the rear technical units of all types that were directly subordinate to the COSVN headquarters.

(U) The irregulars were organized forces composed of guerrilla, self-defense, and secret self-defense elements, which were subordinate to the village- and hamlet-level VC/NVA organizations. These forces carried out a wide variety of missions in support

of VC/NVA activities and provided a training and mobilization base for the combat forces. Guerrillas were full-time forces organized into companies and platoons, which did not always stay in their home village or hamlet. Typical missions for guerrillas involved collecting taxes, protecting village party committees, and conducting terrorism, sabotage, and propaganda activities. Self-defense forces were a part-time paramilitary structure, which defended hamlet and village areas controlled by the VC/NVA. These forces, which did not leave their home area, conducted propaganda, constructed fortifications, and defended their homes. The secret self-defense forces were a clandestine VC/NVA organization whose general functions in GVN-controlled villages and hamlets were the same as those of the self-defense forces in VC/NVA-controlled areas. But their operations involved intelligence collection in addition to sabotage and propaganda activities.

(U) The VC/NVA politico-military infrastructure was the apparatus through which the VC/NVA controlled its entire effort in South Vietnam, including its military forces (except the NVA divisions). It embodied the Peoples Revolutionary Party control structure, which included a command apparatus at the national level (COSVN) and the leadership of a parallel front organization, the NLF (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam), which extended from the national level down through the hamlet level.

(U) These descriptions in themselves suggest some of the problems involved in estimating VC/NVA force levels. The combat and combat support units were probably the easiest to count, because they spent much of their time inside South Vietnam, although they didn't show themselves very often. Much of the administrative service force was outside the country, in Laos or Cambodia. The COSVN was the most important headquarters, but it stayed out of the country, as did the units that supported the infiltration routes. And of course much of the logistical tail for the NVA forces remained in North Vietnam. The Allied forces had little or no access to any of the VC/NVA support areas until very late in the war, and consequently the difficulties of estimating VC/NVA forces there were formidable. There was great interest in knowing how much of the force was composed of Viet Cong personnel from the

\*The VC/NVA's headquarters for directing the campaign in South Vietnam.



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TABLE 10. VC/NVA force estimates changed. Source: "Revised Estimates of VC/NVA Order of Battle," SEA Analysis Rpt., December 1967, page 4. (Table classified Confidential.)

	Old Estimate <sup>a/</sup> <u>Total Forces</u>	New Estimate <sup>b/</sup> <u>Military Forces</u>	Combined Estimate <sup>c/</sup> <u>Total Forces</u>
Combat Strength <sup>d/</sup>			
VC	62,852	62,852	62,852
NVA	<u>53,700</u>	<u>53,700</u>	<u>53,700</u>
Total	116,552	116,552	116,552
Administrative Service	25,753	38,000	38,000
Irregulars <sup>e/</sup>			
Guerrillas	37,587	81,300	81,300
Self Defense and Secret Self Defense	<u>75,173</u>	<u>f/</u> 75,173-162,600	
Total	112,760		156,473-243,900
VC/NVA Infrastructure	<u>39,175</u>	<u>f/</u>	<u>84,000</u>
Total	294,240	235,852    395,025-482,452	

a/ The presentation and strength estimates used by MACV before 31 October 1967.

b/ MACV's new presentation, without self-defense, secret self-defense, and political cadre and with his new strength estimates of administrative service and guerrilla strengths.

c/ The pre 31 October 1967 total OB presentation with the new estimates of administrative service, guerrilla and political cadre strengths.

d/ Includes confirmed, probable, and possible.

e/ "The old data divided the 100,000 to 120,000 irregulars, roughly putting one-third of them into the guerrilla and the other two-thirds into self-defense and/or secret self-defense personnel." - MACV Briefing on Enemy Order of Battle, 24 November 1967.

f/ "The self-defense forces provide a base for recruitment as well as for political and logistical support, but are not a fighting force comparable to the guerrillas. Although secret self-defense forces cause some casualties and damage, they do not represent a continual or dependable force and do not form a valid part of the enemy's military force. The political cadre (infrastructure) has no military function". - MACV Briefing on Enemy Order of Battle, 24 November 1967.

south and how much of it consisted of North Vietnamese troops who came down in infiltration trails. It was seldom possible to tell them apart, although gross changes in the mix of the forces were discernable.

(U) The irregulars and VC/NVA infrastructure posed additional problems. Even if an accurate count was possible, were they military forces that should be counted in the same way as the regulars? After counting them all for awhile, MACV finally decided in October 1967 to retain the guerrillas in the military order of battle, but not the self-defense forces, secret self-defense forces, and the VC/NVA infrastructure. One effect of this change

was to lower the estimated force level, as shown in Table 10.

(U) Table 10 is complicated, but so is the problem. Briefly, the old estimate (first column) includes all of the categories, while the new estimate (second column) no longer includes the self-defense forces and Viet Cong infrastructure, but shows large increases in administrative service and guerrilla personnel. The net result is a decrease of about 58,000 in the VC/NVA force level. The third column shows what would have happened to the force level had all the elements been included in a single total; it goes up by *at least* 100,000. This didn't mean that VC/NVA forces had increased



TABLE 11. VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam, December 31 strength in thousands.<sup>a, b, c</sup> (Table classified Confidential.)

	1964 (U)	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
REGULAR COMBAT FORCES									
North Vietnamese (NVA)									
Units <sup>e/</sup>	6	30	54	69	80- 85	70- 75	63- 67	53- 58	99-115
Fillers in VC Units <sup>d/</sup>	NA	NA	NA	NA	20- 25	20- 25	15- 20	15- 20	15- 15
NVA TOTAL	6	30	54	69	100-110	90-100	78- 87	68- 78	114-130
Viet Cong - TOTAL <sup>f/</sup>	50	64	64	63	50- 60	30- 40	32- 43	27- 38	24- 35
Total Combat	56	94	118	132	150-170	120-140	110-130	95-115	138-165
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES									
NVA	4	4	5	6	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	35- 45	45- 60
VC	39	46	46	43	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	35- 48
TOTAL	43	50	51	49	80-100	80-100	80-100	75- 95	80-108
GUERRILLAS	81	82	121	81	60- 70	40- 50	30- 40	25- 35	25- 35
GRAND TOTAL <sup>g/</sup>	180	226	290	262	290-340	240-290	220-270	195-245	243-308

a/Estimates for 1964-1967 are from Table 105, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), January 10, 1973, p. 4, and are based on summary information in the MACV-J2, JGS-J2, Order of Battle Summary, retroactively adjusted.

b/Estimates for 1968-1972 are from "Adjusted DIA Estimates for VC/NVA Forces in RVN/Cambodia-Retro-OB-Strengths," March 13, 1973. c/ Includes enemy forces in-country and in border areas.

d/ In addition to those in North Vietnamese Army Units, there are also NVA personnel in Viet Cong units, but no estimate of the number in such units is available until the 4th quarter of 1968. e/ Includes personnel in maneuver and combat support battalions. f/ For 1964-1967 the total enemy strength estimate is considered accurate to plus or minus 20,000.

that much, but simply that newly captured documents revealed additional forces that had been there all along. The example illustrates the order-of-battle problems associated with the unconventional VC/NVA force structure.

(U) Other problems arose as a result of making the destruction of VC/NVA forces the primary Allied military objective in the war.\* Until Vietnamization began in earnest during the summer of 1969, the main U.S. military objective was to destroy the VC/NVA forces faster than they could be replaced. This generated pressure to hold the force levels down and to lower them, if possible. For example, during 1967 the intelligence estimates showed a steady drop in VC/NVA guerrilla strength, reportedly the result of heavy combat losses and mounting recruit problems. However, the intensity of the 1968 Tet offensive led to questions about the decline, and an analysis of the guerrilla data reported separately in the HES (Hamlet Evaluation System)† also cast doubts upon it. Instead of a decline from 116,000 guerrillas in March 1967 to 81,000 in December, a

HES-based estimate suggested a guerrilla force of 155,000, which remained nearly constant all year.<sup>(16)</sup> This is not to assert that the HES estimate was correct, but simply to make the point that all estimates of guerrilla strength should be viewed with strong skepticism.

(U) By now, the reader may be asking whether the VC/NVA force estimates have any validity at all. The estimators were aware of the great uncertainties in their estimates, and they did their best to furnish a reasonably accurate picture of the VC/NVA forces, although their reluctance to provide good retrospective estimates for accurate trends persisted. But the fact is that an enormous effort went into the estimates, and they probably improved as the years passed. The presence of uncertainties was recognized by stating the estimates in ranges instead of as single figures—on Dec. 31, 1972, for example, the spread was 65,000 troops. Despite the problems, the figures are useful, and they must be addressed in any attempt to describe what happened in Vietnam.

#### VC/NVA FORCE LEVELS AND TRENDS

(U) *Troop Strength.* Table 11 displays the data available on VC/NVA troop strengths since 1964.

\*See Chapter IX for an analysis of the attrition strategy.  
†See Chapter XIII for a description and analysis of HES.



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TABLE 12. VC/NVA battalions in South Vietnam; number of battalions, December 31.<sup>a</sup> (Table classified Confidential.)

	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
North Vietnamese (C) <sup>a/</sup>	(U)	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
Maneuver	12	41	75	103	129	149	120	122	285
Combat Support	0	14	31	43	45	54	55	50	118
Total	12	55	106	146	174	203	175	172	403 <u>b/</u>
Viet Cong (C) <sup>a/</sup>									
Maneuver	66	96	86	99	125	132	118	112	59
Combat Support	7	9	9	13	17	17	20	17	5
Total	73	105	95	112	142	149	138	129	64 <u>b/</u>
Grand Total (C) <sup>a/</sup>	85	160	201	258	316	352	313	301	467

Source: Table 105, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), January 10, 1973, pp. 1-4. Includes enemy forces in-country and in border areas. The data for 1970, 1971 and 1972 for this table are based on summary information included in the MACV All-Source Unit Strength Summary. Unlike the data shown for prior years, which are based on summary information included in the MACV-J2, J2-JGS Order of Battle Summary, these estimates do not reflect retroactive adjustments. They represented MACV-J2's best current estimate of enemy strength and battalions at the end of each month.

a/ Excludes Administrative Service battalions.

b/ All Viet Cong units estimated to be 70 percent or more filled with North Vietnamese personnel were shifted to the NVA category, but no retroactive adjustments were made to show a more accurate trend.

The 1964-67 and 1968-72 periods were estimated differently, and intelligence analysts warned that they would not track. They considered all the figures to be rough estimates (note the wide ranges of the 1968-72 figures), but would have put more credence in the later figures than in the earlier ones. According to Table 11:

- (U) The total VC/NVA force fluctuates to some extent from year to year, but overall, it remains quite stable.\* The difference between the 1965 estimate and the low end of the 1972 estimate is only 8 percent (the high estimate is 36 percent *higher*).
- (U) About two-thirds of the combat force

after 1968 were estimated to be NVA troops, including NVA fillers in Viet Cong units. These percentages didn't change much until 1972, when the NVA share climbed to 80 percent. Again, the reader should not impute to the NVA-VC force-mix estimates any precision that is not there.

- (U) The administrative services forces remained stable in the early and later estimates, but they doubled in going from one to the other.
- (C) The guerrilla strength remained at about 80,000 in 1964-65, rose to 120,000<sup>†</sup> in 1966, and then fell back to 80,000 again in 1967. The 1968-72 estimates start lower than the earlier estimates, and then they decline more by the end of 1971. (Estimating the size of the guerrilla forces is difficult, and this generated much controversy within the intelligence community. Disagreements about the estimates probably exist even today, so they

\* (U) Between 1965 and 1967 the VC/NVA forces increased only 16 percent. Between 1968 and 1972 they fell only 9 percent or 16 percent, depending on the high or low estimates, respectively. As additional evidence of stability, it is interesting to note that the 1964-67 estimates range from 180,000 (1964) to 290,000 (1966). The low ends of the 1968-72 estimates are almost the same: 195,000 to 290,000. The high ends fall into a range of 245,000 to 340,000. All three sets of estimates have ranges of about 100,000.

<sup>†</sup>The 120,000 figure is questionable, because it doesn't fit the other patterns of the 1964-67 period.



TABLE 13. *Allied troops tripled by 1969, then declined 25 percent as U.S. and third-nation troops withdrew. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Year End Strength In Thousands	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
RVNAF (C) <sup>a/</sup>	514	571	623	643	819	969	1047	1046	1090
US (U)	23	184	385	486	536 <sup>c/</sup>	475	335	158	24
3rd Nation (U) <sup>b/</sup>	.5	23	53	59	66	70	68	54	36
Total (C)	538	778	1061	1188	1421	1514	1450	1258	1150

Source: Table 3, *Southeast Asia Statistical Summary*, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), February 14, 1973.

a/ Includes regular, regional, and popular forces, but not para-military forces, such as CIDG, national police, RD cadre, People's Self-Defense Forces, etc.

b/ Includes military forces of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand, plus a few civilians from the Philippines, Republic of China, and Spain.

c/ U.S. troop strength peaked in April 1969 at 543,400.

should be used with care.) It is important to note that the reduction in guerrilla strength from 1968 through 1972 accounted for 75 to 100 percent of the total force decline during that five-year period.

(U) *VC/NVA Battalions*. Table 12 suggests that the total number of VC/NVA maneuver and combat battalions fluctuated in the same way as the combat strength, except in 1969, when the troop strength fell but the number of battalions reportedly increased. This suggests that the average size of the VC/NVA battalion fell in 1969, which appears to be what actually happened. Calculations of average strength per battalion can be misleading, but in this case the data do seem to suggest that the average battalion size was between 500 and 600 troops at the end of each year from 1964 through 1968. Then, with heavy losses having occurred in the 1968 Tet offensive, the average battalion size dropped to 300 to 400 by the end of 1969 and remained in that range.

(U) Incidentally, Table 12 shows what happens when a current estimate is changed but no retrospective adjustment is made to clarify the trend. In 1972, the North Vietnamese battalions increased from 172 to 403, while the Viet Cong battalions declined sharply. A good portion of the increase stemmed from a decision to shift all Viet Cong battalions having 70 percent or more

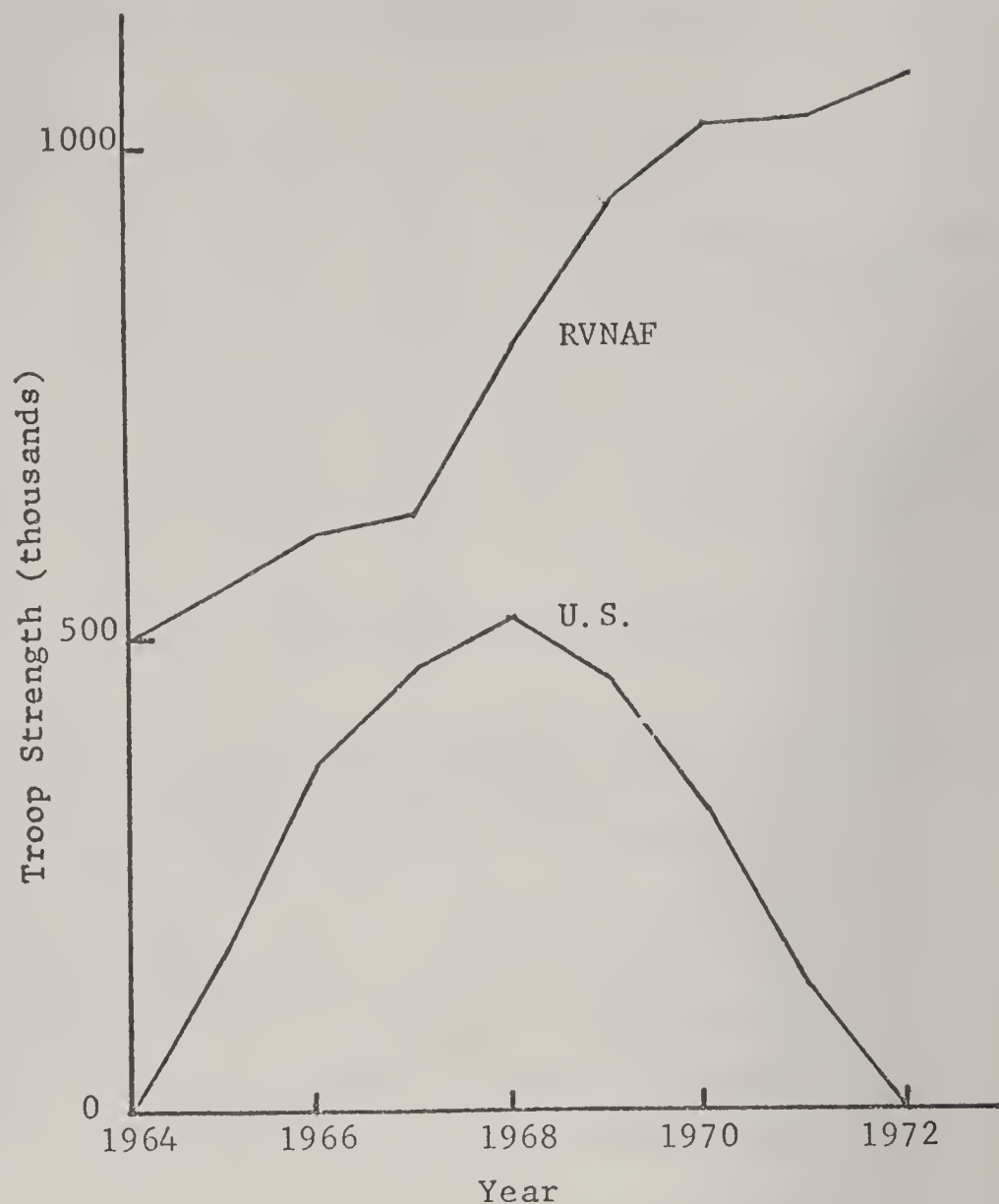


Figure 6. The RVNAF troop buildup did not begin until the U.S. troop strength had peaked. (Figure classified Confidential.)

NVA personnel into the NVA category. This doubled the NVA battalions, while halving the Viet Cong battalions. Actually, the situation didn't change at all as much as might be inferred from the table; but without a retrospective adjustment, it is impossible to figure out what the trends really were. For example, the table shows a decline of 65 Viet Cong battalions. Were these all shifted to the NVA category or did some disappear? There is no way to tell from the table without a retrospective adjustment, and one is not available.

### ALLIED FORCES

(U) Six nations contributed military forces to fight the VC/NVA in South Vietnam: The United States, Republic of Vietnam, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand. South Vietnam furnished most of the forces, followed by the United States and then Korea. (The Koreans provided most of the third-nation forces.) All of the countries furnished ground forces, while the naval and air forces were contributed by South



Vietnam and the United States. To simplify, the data are presented here in three categories: RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces), United States, and third nation.

FORCE LEVELS AND TRENDS

(U) Table 13 shows that Allied military strength almost tripled between the end of 1964 (538,000) and the end of 1969 (1,514,000).\* But by the end of 1972 (1,150,000) it had declined to the 1967 level (1,188,000). The major U.S. buildup was in 1965, 1966, and 1967, but the RVNAF buildup came later, in 1968, 1969, and 1970. During the period 1965–67, the U.S. forces increased by 465,000, but only 130,000 troops were added to the RVNAF. In the three years after the 1968 Tet offensive, the RVNAF added 405,000 troops, as U.S. forces declined by 150,000. (Figure 6 shows the pattern.)

(U) *RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces)*. The South Vietnamese military forces had three major components: regular forces, Regional Forces, and Popular Forces. The regular forces were composed of ARVN (Army), VNMC (Marine Corps), VNN (Navy), and VNAF (Air Force), and these were all designed to perform the functions one would expect of such forces. Theoretically, they could be used anywhere in South Vietnam, but actually only a few of them operated throughout the country. Most confined their operations to one of the four military regions. The Regional Forces started out as infantry companies that stayed within a district or province of South Vietnam and never operated outside of it. Later in the war, the Regional Forces were upgraded to battalions, and they began to operate in adjoining provinces when needed, particularly during the 1972 offensive. The Popular Forces were local platoons assigned to specific villages.† They manned the outposts, guarded the bridges, and attempted to maintain security in their villages, and they were not supposed to be used in any other area.

(C) Table 14 displays the RVNAF forces for 1965–72. The buildup of the total RVNAF force

\*The total Allied strength peaked in February 1970 at 1,525,000.  
†Villages in Vietnam have boundaries similar to a township in the United States. A hamlet is a specific geographical concentration of people.

TABLE 14. *The RVNAF doubled in size. (Table classified Confidential.)*

<u>Year-End Strength</u> <u>In Thousands</u>	1964 (U)	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (U)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
<u>Regular Forces:</u>									
Army (ARVN)	220	268	284	303	380	416	414	408	460
Navy (VNN)	12	15	17	16	19	30	41	42	42
Marines (VNMC)	7	7	7	8	9	11	13	14	16
Air Force (VNAF)	11	13	15	16	19	37	45	50	52
Sub-Total	250	303	323	343	427	494	513	514	570
<u>Regional Forces (RF)</u>									
	196	132	150	151	220	261	283	284	301
<u>Popular Forces (PF)</u>									
	168	136	150	149	172	214	251	248	219
Total RVNAF (C)	514	571	623	643	819	969	1047	1046	1090

Source: Table 3, *Southeast Asia Statistical Summary*, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), February 14, 1973.

is evident, and the table shows how each force fared in it:

- (C) The RVNAF doubled between 1964 (514,000) and 1972 (1,090,000). Within the total, the regular forces also doubled, with the Army dominating, while the Regional Forces tripled. After a decline in 1965, the Popular Forces eventually increased by 50 percent‡ to reach their peak and then began to decline in 1971, falling more noticeably in 1972.
- (U) Within the regular forces, the impact of Vietnamization begins to show in 1969 and 1970, with sharp increases in the Navy and Air Force. The Navy in 1972 was 3½ times as large as it was in 1964, and the Air Force was about five times as large. The Army buildup started in 1968, with the Tet offensive, and it was fairly complete by the end of 1969, although there was an additional spurt in 1972. The figures reflect the Vietnamization program’s emphasis on building up the ground forces first, while waiting for the long-lead-time programs for the Air Force and Navy to take effect.
- (U) The mix of the RVNAF force structure (regulars on the one hand and Regional and Popular Forces on the other) did not change much, but the combination of rapid growth in Regional and Popular Forces and later U.S

‡Above the level at the end of 1964.



TABLE 15. *South Vietnamese paramilitary forces tripled. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Year-End Strength In Thousands	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG)	22	29	35	38	42	35	0 <sup>a/</sup>	0	0
National Police	31	52	58	74	79	85	88	114	121
Revolutionary Development Cadre <sup>b/</sup>	0	0	0	44	53	52	44	33	23
Others <sup>c/</sup>	0	0	0	0	5	7	7	4	4
Total Para-Military	53	81	93	156	179	179	139	151	148

Source: Table 3, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Feb. 14, 1973.

- <sup>a/</sup> Program of conversion to border defense and ARVN completed December 1970.
- <sup>b/</sup> Includes Troung Son Cadre who worked with the Montagnards.
- <sup>c/</sup> Kit Carson Scouts and Armed Propaganda Teams (APT).

withdrawals had the effect of shifting emphasis in the remaining Allied force toward territorial operations. For example, the Regional and Popular Forces accounted for 27 percent of the Allied force in 1968, before U.S. withdrawals, but by the end of 1972 they accounted for 45 percent.

(U) *South Vietnamese Paramilitary Units.* Table 15 shows that the personnel strengths of the South Vietnamese paramilitary units tripled between 1964 and 1972. These data are often displayed with the RVNAF totals, and they therefore call for brief mention at this point (a detailed discussion of each force and its performance appears in Chapter XIV). Four major groups are shown. The CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Groups—usually Montagnards) were advised by U.S. Special Forces Teams along the South Vietnamese borders of Laos and Cambodia. Their mission was primarily to provide border security. They really should be included in the RVNAF totals from the beginning, because they performed military missions and also because they were incorporated into the RVNAF in 1969 and 1970 as border defense units. The National Police quadrupled, showing particularly rapid growth in 1971 as the importance of developing an effective police force was recognized. The RD Cadre (Revolutionary Development Cadre) were the cutting edge of the pacification program. After a modicum of security was established in an area, the RD Cadre went in to bring government programs to the people and to organize support for the Government of Vietnam. As the table indicates, this program was phased out as the need

TABLE 16. *United States forces in South Vietnam; end-of-year strength in thousands. (Table unclassified.)*

Year-End Strength In Thousands	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
U.S. <sup>a/</sup>									
Army	15	117	239	320	360	331	351	120	14
Marine Corps	1	38	69	78	81	55	25	(.6)	1
Air Force	6	20	53	56	58	58	43	29	8
Navy & Coast Guard	1	9	24	32	37	31	17	8	1
Total	23	184	385	486	536	475	336	157	24

Source: Table 103, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), February 7, 1973.

<sup>a/</sup> Includes temporary duty (TDY) personnel.

for it diminished. Other paramilitary groups included the Kit Carson Scouts, who assisted friendly forces, and the Armed Propaganda Teams, who operated in villages where security was tenuous. Both groups drew their people from VC/NVA defectors who surrendered to the Government of Vietnam through the Chieu Hoi Program (see Chapter XVI). Finally, the PSDF (Peoples Self-Defense Forces) added several hundred thousand villagers to the local troops charged with village security. Their numbers are not shown in Table 15, because the data are not comparable to those for the other paramilitary forces (although PSDF data do appear in Chapter XIV).

(U) *U.S. Forces.* In December 1964, there were 23,310 U.S. troops in South Vietnam. The total peaked at 543,400 in April 1969, and by the end of 1972 it had returned to the 1964 level (24,172).<sup>(17)</sup> Table 16 shows the pattern and how the strength of each military service changed over time. The Army and Marine Corps accounted for 80 percent of the forces.\*

(U) It has already been noted that the bulk of the U.S. forces arrived in Vietnam during 1965–67 and then redeployed to the United States in 1970–72. The Air Force was built up the fastest and remained in Vietnam the longest. It reached 90 percent of peak strength by the end of 1966, and 14 percent of its peak strength remained at the end of 1972. The Marine Corps arrived early and left early. It reached 85 percent of its peak strength

\*The cumulative number who had served in Vietnam from Jan. 1, 1965 through Sept. 30, 1972 is: Army, 1,641,969; Navy, 144,062; Air Force, 356,724; and Marine Corps, 447,725, for a total of 2,590,480.



TABLE 17. *Authorized force levels in South Vietnam, in thousands. (Table unclassified.)*

Sea Program Number	Approval Date	Force Level Authorized	Effective Date	Increase/Decrease
<b>Build-up</b>				
1 (Phase I)	Jul 31, 65a/	190.1	Jun 67	-
2 (Phases II, IIA, IIIR)	Dec 11, 65a/	393.9	Jun 67	+203.8
3	Jul 2, 66b/	437.0	Jun 67	+43.1
4	Nov 18, 66c/	470.0	Jun 68	+33.0
5	Aug 14, 67d/	525.0	Jun 69	+55.0
6	Apr 4, 68e/	549.5	Jun 69	+24.5
<b>Withdrawal</b>				
7 (Increment 1)	Jun 8, 69f/	524.5	Aug 31, 69	-25.0
8 (Increment 2)	Sep 16, 69g/	484.0	Dec 15, 69	-40.5
9 (Increment 3)	Dec 15, 69h/	434.0	Apr 15, 70	-50.0
				-115.5
President announces reduction of 150,000 US spaces. Done in stages.				
	Apr 20, 70i/	(284.00)	May 1, 71	
10 (Increment 4)	Jun 3, 70j/	384.0	Oct 15, 70	-50.0
11 (Increment 5)	Oct 12, 70k/	344.0	Dec 31, 70	-40.0
12 (Increment 6)	Mar 1, 71l/	284.0	May 1, 71	-60.0
				-150.0
President announces reduction of 100,000. Done in 3 stages.				
	Apr 7, 71m/	(184.0)	Dec 1, 71	
13 (Increment 7)	Apr 9, 71n/	254.7	Jun 30, 71	-29.3
14 (Increment 8)	Apr 9, 71o/	226.0	Aug 31, 71	-28.7
15 (Increment 9)	Apr 9, 71p/	184.0	Dec 1, 71	-42.0
				-100.0
16 (Increment 10)	Nov 12, 71q/	139.0	Jan 31, 72	-45.0
17 (Increment 11)	Jan 13, 72r/	69.0	May 1, 72	-70.0
18 (Increment 12)	Apr 26, 72s/	49.0	Jul 1, 72	-20.0
19 (Increment 13)	Jun 28, 72t/	39.0	Sep 1, 72	-10.0
20 (Increment 14)	Aug 28, 72u/	27.0	Dec 1, 72	-12.0
				-157.0

## Footnotes to Table 17

- SEA Programs 1 and 2 were referred to as Phase I and Phase II Deployments, respectively. Phase II was then modified, and programs Phase IIA and Phase IIB were adopted in late 1965 and early 1966. A draft Presidential memorandum of Dec. 11, 1965 incorporated the Phase II Deployments, called the "December Plan."
- SecDef memorandum, July 2, 1966, "Southeast Asia Deployment Plan."
- SecDef memorandum, Nov. 18, 1966, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #4."
- Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, Aug. 14, 1967, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #5."
- Deputy Secretary of Defense memorandum, April 4, 1968, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #6."
- Presidential announcement on June 8, 1969, followed by SecDef memorandum, July 15, 1969, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #7."
- Presidential announcement on Sept. 16, 1969, followed by SecDef memorandum, Oct. 6, 1969, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #8."
- Presidential announcement on Dec. 15, 1969, followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis)

memorandum, Feb. 9, 1970, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #9."

- Presidential announcement on April 20, 1970 to reduce 150,000 troop spaces in South Vietnam by May 1, 1970, promulgated by incremental redeployments, SEA Program #10 through SEA Program #12.
- Presidential announcement on June 3, 1970, followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, Aug. 27, 1970, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #10."
- Presidential announcement on Oct. 12, 1970, followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, Dec. 16, 1970, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #11."
- Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, March 1, 1971, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #12."
- Presidential announcement of April 7, 1971 to reduce 100,000 U.S. spaces in South Vietnam by Dec. 1, 1971.
- SecDef memorandum, April 9, 1971, "U.S. Redeployments," followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, June 2, 1971, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #13."
- Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, July 15, 1971, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #14."
- Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, Sept. 28, 1971, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #15."
- Presidential announcement of Nov. 12, 1971 to reduce 45,000 U.S. spaces in South Vietnam by Jan. 31, 1972 and SecDef memorandum, Nov. 15, 1971, "U.S. Redeployments From South Vietnam," followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, Dec. 30, 1972, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #16."
- Presidential announcement of Jan. 13, 1972 to reduce 70,000 U.S. spaces in South Vietnam by May 1, 1972 and SecDef memorandum, Jan. 13, 1972, "U.S. Redeployments From the RVN," followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, March 17, 1972, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #17."
- Presidential announcement of April 26, 1972 to reduce 20,000 U.S. spaces in South Vietnam by July 1, 1972 and SecDef memorandum, May 4, 1972, "Redeployments From the RVN," followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, June 12, 1972, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #18."
- Presidential announcement of June 28, 1972 to reduce 10,000 U.S. spaces in South Vietnam by Sept. 1, 1972 and SecDef memorandum, July 1, 1972, "U.S. Redeployments From the RVN," followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #19."
- Presidential announcement of Aug. 28, 1972 to reduce 12,000 U.S. spaces in South Vietnam by Dec. 1, 1972 and SecDef memorandum, Sept. 5, 1972, "U.S. Redeployments From the RVN," followed by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) memorandum, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #20."

by the end of 1966 and then virtually withdrew by the end of 1971. The Army and the Navy built up at slower rates, not approaching their peak strengths until the end of 1967. This is not surprising, because the Army deployed four times as many troops as any other Service.

(U) Table 17 displays the stages of the U.S. force buildup in South Vietnam and the subsequent

withdrawal. The buildup, in six steps, culminated in a peak *authorized* U.S. force level of 549,500 spaces. (The *actual* strength peaked at 543,400, or 6,100 below the authorized level.)

(U) The withdrawals, or redeployments, took place in 14 increments which for convenience can be grouped into four major steps. In the first step, the President made three separate announcements



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TABLE 18. *Third-nation forces; end-of-year strength in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1964 (U)	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
Australia	.2	1.5	4.4	6.8	7.6	7.6	6.8	2.0	0
Korea	.2	20.7	45.6	47.8	49.9	50.2	48.6	45.7	35.4
New Zealand	.03	.1	.2	.5	.6	.5	.6	.1	0
Philippines	.03	.1	2.1	2.0	1.6	0.2	0.1	.1	.1
Thailand	<u>.02</u>	<u>.02</u>	<u>.2</u>	<u>2.2</u>	<u>5.9</u>	<u>11.8</u>	<u>11.6</u>	<u>6.0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	.5	22.4	52.5	59.3	65.6	70.3	67.7	53.9	35.5

Source: Table 3, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the

Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), February 14, 1973.

authorizing the redeployment of 115,500 U.S. troops, thus reducing their number to a level of 434,000 on April 15, 1970. In the second step, the President announced a force reduction of 150,000 by May 1, 1971, dropping the authorized level to 284,000. This reduction took place in the three increments (4, 5, and 6) shown in the table. Then, in another single announcement, the President reduced the forces by 100,000. This resulted in an authorized force level of 184,000 on Dec. 1, 1971. This was also done in three increments (7, 8, and 9). The final step (prior to the cease-fire agreement) consisted of five Presidential announcements that reduced forces by 157,000, to a level of 27,000 by Dec. 1, 1972. The cease-fire agreement then provided for the withdrawal of the remaining U.S. forces.

(U) *Third-Nation Forces.* Australia, Korea, New Zealand, and Thailand all contributed military forces to fight in Vietnam, and the Philippines sent a civilian contingent. The Korean (ROK) forces comprised 80 percent of the third-nation contribution. They built up to a force of about 45,000 by the end of 1966, and most of them were still in Vietnam at the end of 1972. The Korean units operated primarily in Military Region 2 and a few operated in Military Region 1. Table 18 displays the third-nation personnel strengths by country.

### CONCLUSIONS

(U) At least two patterns and a question emerge from the data presented in this chapter. The first

pattern reflects the shift in force composition on both sides as the years passed. The VC/NVA forces consisted progressively less of Viet Cong and more of the North Vietnamese Army (paralleling and influencing the second trend noted below). The decline in Viet Cong strength and compensatory increase in North Vietnamese Army troops (even as fillers in ostensibly Viet Cong units) was notable. In contrast, the Allies relied increasingly on outside forces (United States, Republic of Korea, and other third nations) in the early years 1965-68 and then reverted mostly to RVNAF. *Thus, the VC/NVA relied increasingly on North Vietnamese Army troops from outside of South Vietnam, while the Allies relied more on the RVNAF troops from within South Vietnam.*

(U) A second pattern is the gradual change in the kind of war both sides fought. This will become clearer after reading Chapters V and VI. To oversimplify, the VC/NVA built up from primarily Viet Cong guerrilla operations (and forces) to progressively greater emphasis on main forces. This trend accelerated as regular North Vietnamese Army units were brought in, first, for the kill in 1964-65 and, then, to counter the U.S. buildup. Gradual Allied attrition of the Viet Cong also made the VC/NVA effort more and more of a main-force war, culminating ironically in its most conventional effort of all—the Easter 1972 offensive that made use mostly of regular North Vietnamese Army troops with artillery and armor. The Allies were predominately regulars all along (including RVNAF regular forces), but the 1967-72 pacification effort gradually built up the



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Allied counterguerrilla and anti-VC infrastructure effort. Meanwhile, gradual U.S. withdrawal reduced the Allied main forces. *Hence, the Allied style and force structure was becoming somewhat less conventional as the VC/NVA became notably more conventional.*

(U) The question emerging from this chapter is why the Allies couldn't destroy the VC/NVA forces, since they outnumbered them by substantial margins throughout the war.

(U) A comparison of the Allied and VC/NVA forces (Tables 11 and 13) shows that the Allies always outnumbered the VC/NVA by at least three to one. During 1969-71, the ratio was almost six to one. Despite this advantage, the Allies could not destroy the VC/NVA forces, and the VC/NVA force level at the end of 1972 was in fact slightly

higher than in 1965.\* The VC/NVA forces seemed to be considerably weaker by 1972, but their army remained intact. If the additional Allied advantages of mobility, firepower, and combat support are taken into account, it is even more difficult to understand how the VC/NVA survived. But survive it did, despite the Allied attempt to destroy it. The analysis in Chapter IX suggests some possible reasons why the VC/NVA were able to hold out and why they finally accepted the stalemate and signed the cease-fire agreement in January 1973.

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\*This may be due in part to the tendency of the intelligence community to be more willing to add units to the "enemy" order of battle than to drop them, despite the attrition objective. Also, the estimates probably improved in the later years, with a more complete accounting for the VC/NVA combat units and support troops, and this may have had the effect of raising the levels of the estimates.

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UNCLASSIFIED

PART TWO  
THE MAIN FORCE WAR

UNCLASSIFIED





## Chapter V

### How Did the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Forces Operate?

(U) This chapter is based on all the reports of VC/NVA-initiated actions in South Vietnam. Many incidents probably weren't reported, but those that were recorded are sufficient to determine the style, patterns, and trends of VC/NVA actions. The analysis examines the various types of VC/NVA operations, their levels and trends over time, where they were concentrated, and how the targeting of Allied forces changed over time.

(U) In a war without fronts, it is particularly important to keep a detailed historical record of the enemy's pattern of actions. As with the forces, the actions will be scattered about the country, and they may appear random and individually unimportant at first glance. If the enemy is well organized and is operating seriously, analysis will reveal that his actions, far from being random, follow well-defined patterns. These patterns are extremely important, since they provide concrete evidence of what the enemy is doing, sometimes contrasting with what he says he is doing, and sometimes supporting it. Incident patterns yield many clues about intent, strategy, strength, and weakness.<sup>(1)</sup>\*

(U) The annual cycle of combat should be kept in mind (Chapter II) as a key facet of the VC/NVA style of operation, continuing year after year as a basic background to the patterns explored here—heavy fighting from February through June, a lull in July, renewed combat in

August and September, and a lull in October, all followed by relatively low activity until February, at which time the cycle started all over again.

(U) Table 19 displays the official Department of Defense statistics concerning VC/NVA-initiated actions in South Vietnam; but these data present several problems. One is that the reporting categories were changed without retrospective adjustments, and thus, the time series was disrupted.† For example, incidents involving indirect fire of 20 rounds or more were not counted as attacks until late 1966, and this boosted the total number of attacks in subsequent years in a major way (see Table 20). The same problem is seen in the harassment and terrorism data for 1965–66. In mid-1966, the harassment category was established without a retrospective adjustment and here, too, the trend is disrupted.

(U) The most serious problem in dealing with the official figures is that they do not include VC/NVA actions reported by the Vietnamese National Police and other civilian authorities. These data started to become available in the final quarter of 1967, but they are not included in Table 19. The latter includes only the military reports, and it therefore omits some of the terrorism, sabotage, and propaganda incidents that were reported. Finally, the summary data limit analysis of VC/NVA actions to types of action by military region. To analyze incidents by casualties, provinces,

†This problem was encountered in looking at trends in VC/NVA forces.

\*References for Part Two begin on page 840.



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TABLE 19. VC/NVA actions in South Vietnam; official Department of Defense figures.<sup>a</sup> (Table classified Confidential.)

	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (U)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
<u>Attacks</u>								
Battalion Size or Larger (C)	73	44	54	126	34	13	2	106
Other (C)	612	894	2,422	3,795	3,787	3,526	2,242	6,478
Sub-Total (U)	685	938	2,476	3,921	3,821	3,539	2,244	6,584
<u>Other</u>								
Harassment (C)	-	10,288	19,231	18,233	18,640	19,148	10,648	11,997
Terrorism (U)	20,730	14,585	1,963	1,047	1,375	1,904	2,333	819
Sabotage (C)	4,132	2,212	1,443	1,609	199	185	101	134
Propaganda (C)	1,974	1,504	801	102	43	73	367	24
AA Fire (C)	4,008	8,128	13,290	13,078	10,167	8,734	6,846	817
Total (C)	31,529	37,655	39,204	37,990	34,245	33,583	22,599	20,375

Source: Table 2 Statistics on Vietnam by Month, Southeast Asia  
Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary  
of Defense (Comptroller), April 11, 1973, pp. 1-8.  
(Based on summary data from the MACV-OPREP reports).

TABLE 20. VC/NVA actions in South Vietnam; computer data, including military and civilian reports.  
(Table classified Confidential.)

	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (U)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
<u>Attacks</u>								
Ground Assault (C)	685	906	1,538	1,500	1,615	1,770	1,615	2,429
Indirect Fire Only (C)		32	992	2,410	2,237	1,630	1,009	4,074
Sub-Total (U)	685	938	2,530	3,910	3,852	3,400	2,624	6,503
<u>Harassment</u>								
Harassment by Fire (C)			15,502	13,435	13,812	12,927	7,682	8,939
Other Harassment (C)			7,566	9,716	10,638	12,056	9,973	8,906
Sub-Total (C)			23,068	23,151	24,450	24,983	17,655	17,899
<u>Political &amp; Coercion (C)</u>			1,756	3,237	2,776	3,844	3,552	5,658
<u>Anti-Aircraft Fire (C)</u>			12,066	12,646	9,706	8,081	6,794	774
<u>Total Actions</u>			39,420	42,944	40,784	40,308	30,625	30,834
<u>Difference from Table 1</u>								
<u>Total</u>			216	4,954	6,539	6,725	8,026	10,459

Source: VCIIA and TIRS Computer Files, Department of Defense, National  
Military Command Systems Support Center.

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TABLE 21. *More than 95 percent of the VC/NVA ground assaults were conducted by small units. (Table classified Confidential.)*

VC/NVA Ground Assaults By <sup>a/</sup>	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (U)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)	Total (U)
Battalion Sized or Larger Units <sup>b/</sup> (C)	73	44	54	126	34	13	2	106	452
Small Units <sup>c/</sup> (C)	<u>612</u>	<u>862</u>	<u>1,484</u>	<u>1,374</u>	<u>1,581</u>	<u>1,757</u>	<u>1,613</u>	<u>2,323</u>	<u>11,596</u>
Total Ground Assaults (U)	685	906	1,538	1,500	1,615	1,770	1,615	2,429	12,058

<sup>a/</sup> Sources: VCIIA and TIRS Computer Files, Department of Defense, National Military Command Systems Support Center.

<sup>b/</sup> From Table 1 above.

<sup>c/</sup> Residual figure derived by subtracting battalion sized or larger attacks from total ground assaults.

targets, and detailed types (ground assaults and standoff fire attacks, for example), it is necessary to turn to two computer files which, taken together, record the details of individual actions reported by the military or civil authorities and provide data that are suitable for detailed analysis.

(U) Table 20 displays the complete data in summary form. It contains all of the data shown in Table 19 plus the additional civilian data collected from late 1967 on, so the totals are much higher than those in Table 19.\* The attack data and anti-aircraft data agree with Table 19 quite well, because they were reported only through the military channel. The additions lie in the areas of harassment, terrorism, sabotage, and nonviolent political coercion (propaganda, etc.). The effect of adding indirect fire (20 rounds or more) to the attack category in late 1966 shows up clearly. Such incidents accounted for more than half of the total attacks during the 1967-72 period.

(U) Table 20 shows clearly the unconventional style of the VC/NVA brand of war. Most of their actions—standoff attacks, harassment, and terrorism—did not involve direct contact between their ground forces and those of the Allies, the emphasis in terms of numbers being on indirect attacks and small-scale harassment and terrorism. *The VC/NVA ground assaults against Allied forces accounted for less than 5 percent of the total actions during*

\*Duplication between the military and civilian reports has been screened out; incidents are counted only once, even if they appear in both types of reports.

1965-72, and as seen below, more than 95 percent of the assaults were attacks by VC/NVA units smaller than a battalion.

(U) The various categories of action shown in Table 20 are different enough to require separate analysis. For example, a ground assault is usually a much more serious action than an indirect attack by fire, so it doesn't make much sense to add them and then look only at the total. Thus, the analysis regroups the incidents into ground assaults, standoff attacks, harassment, coercion, and anti-aircraft incidents.

GROUND ASSAULTS

(U) The VC/NVA ground assaults† are shown in Table 21. Here, the figures probably understate the actual rate at which ground attacks took place, because VC/NVA attacks in reaction to Allied operations were seldom, if ever, included in the data. Such actions were normally reported under the heading of Allied operations, not VC/NVA attacks, on the assumption that Allied units, not the VC/NVA units, were on the offensive in such situations.‡ Thus, the figures in the table probably represent the minimum VC/NVA attack rate.

†A ground assault occurs when troops physically attack and make contact with a target or objective. An attack consisting of no more than artillery fire is not an assault, because assault troops do not take part and no direct contact is made with the objective.

‡ This assumption is open to challenge; see Chapter IX.



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TABLE 22. VC/NVA ground assaults were distributed fairly evenly among the military regions. (Table classified Confidential.)

<u>Military Region</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>Total</u>
MR 1	408	305	305	366	332	657	2,373
MR 2	288	391	573	706	551	491	3,000
MR 3	426	438	393	243	205	406	2,111
MR 4	416	366	342	450	471	873	2,918
MR Not Reported	0	0	2	5	56	2	65

TABLE 23. More than 85 percent of the indirect fire incidents were harassments every year until 1972. (Table classified Confidential.)

	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>(U)</u>	<u>(U)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(U)</u>
<u>Attacks by Fire<sup>a/</sup></u>							
MR 1	367	616	409	454	300	2262	4408
MR 2	74	270	387	299	141	463	1634
MR 3	267	831	928	267	153	818	3264
MR 4	284	692	513	604	275	523	2891
Unknown	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>155</u>
SVN Total	992	2410	2237	1630	1009	4074	12352
<u>Harassment by Fire<sup>b/</sup></u>							
MR 1	5642	4150	4087	3781	1543	1686	20889
MR 2	1245	1713	1748	1947	959	1437	9049
MR 3	4057	3123	4034	1510	1314	1976	16014
MR 4	4558	4445	3942	5675	3589	3836	26045
Unknown	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>277</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>300</u>
SVN Total	15502	13435	13812	12927	7682	8939	72297
<u>Total</u>							
MR 1	6009	4766	4496	4235	1843	3948	25297
MR 2	1319	1983	2135	2246	1100	1900	10683
MR 3	4324	3954	4962	1777	1467	2794	19278
MR 4	4842	5137	4455	6279	3864	4359	28936
Unknown	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>417</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>455</u>
SVN Total	16494	15845	16049	14557	8691	13013	84649

Source: SEAPRS Computer File, Department of Defense, National Military

Command Systems Support Center.

a/ 20 rounds or more.

b/ Less than 20 rounds.



(U) *Table 21 suggests that the VC/NVA fought a small-unit war. More than 95 percent of its ground assaults during the eight-year period were conducted by units smaller than a battalion.* Even in the peak combat years of 1968 and 1972, small units accounted for more than 90 percent of the reported attacks. The total number of ground assaults was stable for this five-year period, having doubled between 1965 and 1967 and then leveled off at about 1,600 per year from 1968 to 1972. Only in 1970 was there as much as a 10-percent deviation from the average. Then the 1972 offensive brought a 50-percent increase. On the other hand, after 1966, the fluctuations in battalion-size attacks became a fairly good guide to the intensity of the war. They peaked in 1968, declined steadily in 1969–71, and then rose again in 1972.

(U) Table 22 shows that VC/NVA ground assaults were fairly evenly distributed among the four military regions during the six years shown. No military region saw less than 20 percent of the action, and none saw more than 28 percent. But the emphasis did vary from year to year. For example, Military Region 2 accounted for 37 percent of all the assaults for the three years from 1969 through 1971. And Military Region 3, after accounting for 27 percent of the action during the first three years, suddenly dropped to 15 percent for the final three years. As would be expected, the VC/NVA ground assaults were concentrated in the same provinces in which Allied combat deaths were highest. The ten provinces showing the highest Allied death rates include eight of the provinces undergoing the highest VC/NVA ground-attack rates.\*

### STANDOFF ATTACKS

(U) Standoff attacks—that is, attacks by indirect fire—are considered in two categories here. The first category includes indirect fire of 20 rounds or more of mortar, rocket, or artillery shells which, along with ground assaults, were classified as attacks in the official statistics. The second category consists of harassment by indirect fire of less than 20 rounds from mortars, rockets, or artillery, or fire from small arms. These are

\*To convert the list of ten provinces with the highest Allied death rates into the list of ten with the highest ground-assault rates, simply drop Kien Hoa and Quang Tin from the death list and add Pleiku and Phu Yen.

grouped with other types of harassment in the official figures. But since the two types of action are alike except for the number of rounds fired, they are analyzed together here.

(U) Typically, an *attack* by fire consisted of about 30 rounds. Although military in style—requiring advanced planning, logistic support, etc.—there was no attempt to assault the target. A standoff attack was generally a means of exerting military pressure on a target that the VC/NVA could not hope (or did not desire) to defeat. Enemy forces inflicted an Allied combat death for every 50 to 60 rounds they fired,<sup>(2)</sup> and although they sometimes suffered casualties from Allied counter-battery fire, they usually escaped unharmed.

(U) *Harassments* by indirect fire usually were isolated incidents, not coordinated with other types of military action and essentially constituting an extension of terrorist activity. Using a small mortar (81 or 82 mm), the VC/NVA would fire six or seven rounds; and for every 25 rounds fired, an Allied soldier or civilian would be killed, usually at no cost to the VC/NVA except for ammunition.<sup>(2)</sup>

(U) *Table 23 indicates that the annual average of indirect fire incidents was quite stable at about 15,000 per year, except for 1971, although a slight declining trend is evident. More than 85 percent of such incidents consisted of harassing fire in every year except 1972, when the high rate of artillery fire introduced into Military Region 1 altered the balance.* The table also suggests that harassments by fire were almost level during 1968–70.

(U) Military Region 4 experienced 34 percent of all standoff attacks during the six-year period and 44 percent of the small attacks during the final three years of that period. Military Region 1 experienced 30 percent of the standoff attacks. *But in 1972 alone, Military Region 1 accounted for nearly 20 percent of the six-year total*, denoting the intensity of the 1972 offensive there and the VC/NVA shift to more conventional tactics. In Military Region 3, harassment by fire dropped sharply in 1970 and remained low from then on. This pattern is similar to that for ground assaults.

### HARASSMENT AND POLITICAL COERCION

(U) Table 24 displays incidents of harassment (other than indirect fire) and VC/NVA acts of a



TABLE 24. *Harassment and political coercion.*  
(Table classified Confidential.)

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(U)
<u>Harassment</u>							
MR 1	2911	3411	2901	3735	2945	3229	19162
MR 2	1499	1878	1911	2831	2119	1903	12141
MR 3	1908	2707	4004	3271	2999	1765	16654
MR 4	1248	1690	1822	2217	1875	2055	10907
Unknown	0	0	0	2	35	8	45
Total	7566	9716	10638	12056	9973	8960	58909
<u>Political-Coercion</u>							
MR 1	114	349	243	710	1206	1464	4086
MR 2	1100	1755	1476	1474	1306	2102	9213
MR 3	381	790	888	1239	722	1171	5191
MR 4	161	343	169	421	318	921	2333
Total	1756	3237	2776	3844	3552	5658	20823

Source: SEAPRS Computer File, Department of Defense, National Military Command Systems Support Center.

political or coercive nature. Harassment includes acts of sabotage and terror, with terror reflecting incidents against civilians that result in casualties: assassinations, abductions, or wounded. The political and coercive category includes actions that were directed at civilians, but which did not inflict casualties: propaganda, holding meetings, entering hamlets, etc.

(U) The table indicates that harassments averaged about 9,800 per year for the six-year period from 1967 through 1972. They did peak in 1970, but the level was fairly constant throughout the period. Military Region 1 accounted for a third of all the harassments, with Military Region 3 close behind, while Military Region 4, which led in harassments by fire, was lowest in other types of harassment.

(U) Acts of a political or coercive nature, without casualties, averaged about 3,500 per year. These were concentrated in Military Region 2 (44 percent), and they showed a rising trend, while again, Military Region 4 had the lowest reported number of such incidents. The figures from Military Region 4, by the way, are low enough to raise questions about the accuracy of reporting there. Indeed, this type of incident was in any case probably reported less accurately than any of the others, because it was less serious (no casualties) and consequently more likely to escape the notice of authorities. Thus, the political-coercion figures should not be taken too seriously.

TERRORISM

(U) Figures dealing with terrorism are included in the harassment category of Table 24, but terrorism is such an important VC/NVA activity that it needs special coverage. Terror is a traditional weapon of the insurgent, and in South Vietnam the Communists began using terror again in 1957 as part of their renewed campaign to unite Vietnam under a Communist government. General Giap recognized the value of terror as a guerrilla war tactic when he said, “. . . the most correct path to be followed by the people to liberate themselves is revolutionary violence (terror) and revolutionary war.” The VC/NVA use of terror in South Vietnam was aimed at several important goals:

- (U) *Intimidation of the people.* The VC/NVA assassinated, abducted, threatened, and harassed the population in order to force its cooperation, to obtain laborers and porters when needed, to collect taxes, food, and other supplies, and to prevent the local inhabitants from giving intelligence to Allied forces.
- (U) *Elimination of enemies.* Certain individuals, particularly GVN officials (hamlet and village chiefs, for example), National Police, RD Cadre, school teachers, and individual citizens who defied VC/NVA threats were specifically marked for elimination. If the individual was unpopular, so much the better, since the VC/NVA could claim credit for removing an “enemy” of the people.
- (U) *Propaganda.* Within Vietnam, the VC/NVA pointed to its terror tactics as signs of its strength and presence throughout the country, even in the cities that traditionally were government strongholds. The VC/NVA also tried to influence external factors, such as the Paris Peace Talks and world public opinion, by terror attacks on well-known U.S. and Vietnamese personalities (for example, the attacks on the Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Vietnam and on several high GVN officials). Such actions gave the VC/NVA publicity and helped boost the morale of its members.

(U) According to Bernard Fall<sup>(3)</sup> and Jay Mallin,<sup>(4)</sup> terror was used as a tactic to isolate the



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TABLE 25. *Officials were most likely to be killed and other civilians most likely to be kidnapped.*<sup>a</sup> (Table unclassified.)

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total
<u>Officials</u>									
Killed	209	168	285	362 <sup>b/</sup>	342	464	352	518	2700
Kidnapped	323	176	192	172 <sup>b/</sup>	119	160	67	134	1343
<u>Other Civilians</u>									
Killed	1691	1564	3421	5027 <sup>b/</sup>	5860	5483	3419	3887	30352
Kidnapped	7992	3634	5177	8587 <sup>b/</sup>	6170	6771	5322	12985	56638
<u>Total Killed</u>	1900	1732	3706	5389 <sup>b/</sup>	6202	5947	3771	4405	33052
<u>Total Kidnapped</u>	8315	3810	5369	8759 <sup>b/</sup>	6289	6931	5378	13119	57970

a/ Source: Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), April 11, 1973, pp. 1-9.

b/ Prior to August 1968, includes terrorist incidents reported by the SVN National Police. Beginning August 1968, includes additionally those incidents reported through military channels.

rural areas from the cities, rural areas being easier for the VC/NVA to control, since the people had not been provided with security by the Vietnamese Government in the past. The elimination of a few key GVN people (the hamlet chief, police chief, local school teacher, etc.) was usually all that was necessary to intimidate the people. Then, once the rural bases were set up—so the theory went—the cities would be isolated and would eventually fall to VC/NVA control through economic pressure, terror tactics, and lack of popular support for the government. The rural terror campaign was complemented by terror tactics in the cities, which served different purposes from terror in the countryside. In the cities, the Communists sought to discredit the government and to undermine the economy by discouraging business activity, causing investment capital to flee, and disrupting transportation and communication.

(U) The Communists explained the function of terror in formulating a three-pronged strategy—military, diplomatic, and political—in their COSVN Resolution No. 9 (July 1969). Military force was to be directed to exert pressure, to cause the United States to speed its withdrawal (and shorten the time available for strengthening the Government of Vietnam), and to keep the Gov-

ernment of Vietnam on a wartime footing. Diplomacy was to marshal world opinion in the Communists' favor, and the "political struggle" was to be accelerated so as to lay the groundwork within South Vietnam itself. Integral to the political struggle would be the liberal use of terrorism to weaken and destroy local government, strengthen the party apparatus, proselyte among the populace, erode the control and influence of the Government of Vietnam, and weaken the RVNAF. If positive benefits could not be gained, COSVN No. 9 indicated, then the VC/NVA would settle for creating "fiercely contested areas." The Communists intended to "motivate" the peasants in all rural areas, regardless of whether they were contested or were controlled by either side. (One experienced observer noted that they sometimes settled for simply teaching the peasants how to remain neutral.)

(U) In summary, terrorism is the means by which the VC/NVA entered (or reentered) populated areas in South Vietnam. Provinces that experienced high levels of terrorism had fairly large populations, and historically they were the sites of VC/NVA bases. It is in these areas that the VC/NVA felt it could rekindle sympathy for its cause, nullify the effect of the GVN presence, and



TABLE 26. *The VC/NVA increased its targeting of U.S. forces; U.S. versus RVNAF shares of KIA from VC/NVA-initiated actions; monthly averages. (Table unclassified.)*

Combat Deaths	1966	1967	1968	1969
U.S.	57	102	215	231
RVNAF	443	463	483	400
Total	500	565	698	631
U.S. %	11	18	31	37

Sources: SEA Analysis Rpt.: "Enemy Emphasis on Causing U.S. Casualties" (April 1969, p. 30) and "Enemy Targeting of U.S. and RVNAF Forces" (Feb. 1970, p. 2)

make inroads into GVN control. In contrast, terrorism in areas traditionally opposed to the VC/NVA (for example, Catholic Hoa Hao) generally stiffened the people's resistance.

(U) Incidents of terror were reported individually from South Vietnam for several years, and before mid-1968, two sets of terrorism data were collected and used separately. One set consisted of Vietnamese National Police data, which were reported to Washington in the USAID monthly report of assassinations and abductions, and the other set was reported through U.S. and Vietnamese military channels, coming to Washington in the OPREP-5 reports. CORDS consolidated the two sets of information into the Terrorist Incident Reporting System (TIRS), which covered the period from late 1967 on.

(U) Table 25 shows the reported number of terrorist victims in South Vietnam. In reading this table it is important to remember that the figures showing persons "killed" do not include the entire toll exacted by the VC/NVA. Many additional civilians were killed in VC/NVA attacks and in actions not included in the terrorism reports (see Chapter XII for an analysis of civilian casualties).

(U) Table 25 suggests that GVN officials were twice as likely to be killed as kidnapped, an average of 340 officials being killed each year, as opposed to 170 being kidnapped. Officials accounted for 8 percent of the killed, but only 2 percent of the kidnapped. For other civilians, the pattern is the exact opposite. They were twice as likely to be kidnapped as killed, and more of them were kidnapped in years of large enemy offensives

(1968 and 1972) than in other years, probably because of the large VC/NVA demand for porters and other support.

(U) After estimating that one South Vietnamese person in a thousand would be a terrorist victim in 1971, an analysis in August 1971 attempted to place the terrorism data from South Vietnam in perspective by comparing them to Bureau of the Census statistics on U.S. crime rates.<sup>(5)</sup> On the basis of 1971 terrorism rates, the analysis found that:

. . . the VC/NVA are assassinating people in Vietnam at a rate which is about 50 percent higher than the murder rates of the three worst U.S. cities (28 per 100,000, compared to murder rates of 18.6 in Charlotte, N.C. and 18.1 for Columbia, S.C. and Shreveport, La.).

. . . woundings occur at a rate of 50 per 100,000, about one-third the aggravated assault rate in the U.S. (152 per 100,000).

. . . terrorist incidents not involving casualties (extortion, taxation, etc.) occur at a rate of 24 per 100,000, about 84 percent below the robbery rate in the U.S. (147 per 100,000).\*

#### ANTIAIRCRAFT INCIDENTS

(U) Antiaircraft incidents are not analyzed in detail here, although the data are shown in Table 19. An antiaircraft incident requires two elements: first, the flight of an aircraft and, second, someone on the ground able and willing to fire at it. The number of such incidents tended to fluctuate with the level of Allied air sorties: As the number of sorties rose, so did the amount of antiaircraft fire in South Vietnam, and vice versa. However, in 1972, when the number of air sorties tripled, the number of antiaircraft incidents fell from 6,800 in 1971 to 800 in 1972. Such a drastic change in the face of intense combat suggests that pilots simply stopped reporting antiaircraft fire, rather than that such fire had stopped. Finally, antiaircraft incidents are a sure sign that the "enemy" is on the ground; and analysis of the pattern of such incidents, particularly if they cluster over periods of time, often provides a good guide to the location of insurgent camps or bases during the early stages of an insurgency, when intelligence usually is sparse.

\*But remember that such incidents in South Vietnam are not reported very well.



## CONFIDENTIAL

### VC/NVA TARGETING OF U.S. FORCES

(U) *Table 26 presents evidence that the VC/NVA increasingly targeted U.S. forces from 1966 through 1969. The U.S. proportion of Allied combat deaths from VC/NVA-initiated actions increased each year, from 11 percent in 1966 to 37 percent in 1969. This rising trend was produced mainly by the fact that RVNAF deaths remained fairly constant, while U.S. deaths resulting from these actions increased in every year shown. The lone exception occurred in 1969, when RVNAF deaths resulting from VC/NVA-inspired incidents declined while U.S. deaths increased relatively little. (But U.S. combat deaths resulting from other actions dropped 35 percent in 1969, which further accents the thrust of VC/NVA targeting.)*

(U) The rising numbers of U.S. forces during the period might seem to explain the apparently increasing VC/NVA tendency to target U.S. troops; that is, it could simply have been that the number of targets increased. But this explanation does not satisfy, because the strength of the RVNAF grew much more than that of the U.S. forces during the period shown. The U.S. component of the total Allied forces dropped from 36 percent at the end of 1966 to 31 percent by the end of 1969 (see Table 13, page 790). Thus, the increasing proportion of U.S. combat deaths was most likely the result of intentional concentration on U.S. targets to keep the U.S. casualty rates as high as possible. The VC/NVA guidance

for the "summer offensive" in 1969 supports this interpretation:

In short, during the 1969 spring offensive we killed many Americans. The most significant success of the 1969 spring offensive was that it boosted the antiwar movement in the United States, which seriously affected the American plan of aggression.

What we should do: For each additional day's stay, the United States must sustain more casualties. For each additional day's stay, they must spend more money and lose more equipment. Each additional day's stay, the American people will adopt a stronger antiwar attitude while there is no hope to consolidate the puppet administration and Army.<sup>(6)</sup>

### CONCLUSION

(U) The large numbers, small size, and dispersed nature of the various types of VC/NVA incidents clearly suggest the need to perform quantitative analysis to seek the patterns of activity that yield clues about the VC/NVA strategy and mode of operation. Essentially, the strategy called for constant small-scale harassment, punctuated by a few high points of activity, particularly during the first half of the year. Battalion-size attacks were relatively rare, as were ground assaults in general. *Continual indirect fire, harassment, and terror were the characteristics of the VC/NVA strategy, and the data show how much the enemy used them year after grinding year as a good substitute for conventional tactics throughout the country. The Communists' war was truly a war without fronts.* ✓✓



## Chapter VI

### How Did Allied Ground Forces Operate?

(U) The *statistical* reporting to Washington of Allied ground operations in South Vietnam, particularly the reporting by the U.S. Army, was so unsystematic that no tables can be presented here, because the figures are not very useful, even for simple analysis of trends and comparisons. The reporting of the U.S. Marines was far better, but the specialized analysis of those data will be left to that organization. Vietnamese reporting of ground operations was more consistent than that of the U.S. Army. This chapter simply explains a few of the problems in dealing with the data and presents some of the major themes that emerged from fragmentary analyses of ground operations that appeared in the *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*.

#### DATA PROBLEMS

(U) The confusion in reporting data about ground operations probably resulted from a persistent inability to understand a war without fronts. It was difficult to figure out what to report and even more difficult to figure out how to report it. Moreover, the problem was compounded by MACV's unwillingness to enforce uniformity of reporting and its strong resistance to changes suggested by outsiders. Basically, the reporting "system" divided the ground operations of Allied forces into large operations and small operations.

(U) A large operation was defined as one conducted by an Allied force of three companies or more,<sup>(7,8)</sup> and the number of such large operations

was a statistic often displayed as an indicator of the tempo of operations by the Allies. But this statistic in itself gave no clue to the sizes or durations of the operations.

(U) The sizes and lengths of large operations were supposed to be described by a statistic called "battalion-days of operation," the title suggesting that each day a battalion spent on a combat operation counted as one battalion-day. But comparing the battalion-days to the number of battalions supposedly involved often showed more battalion-days than were theoretically possible with the battalions on hand. This stemmed from two factors. First, battalion-days weren't really battalion-days at all; they were aggregations of company-days. Three company-days equaled one battalion-day. But lots of battalions had four companies, so they generated four company-days, or 1.33 "battalion-days" per day. Second, the battalion-days measurement soon came to cover every day of a battalion's (or company's) existence. Thus, after correcting for company-days, most of the battalions still showed up as operating at *something* virtually every day, and this degraded the concept of battalion-days as a measure of *combat* effort.

(U) Another common statistic was "operational day of contact." A contact was an action that resulted in the application of firepower by either VC/NVA or Allied forces. An operational day of contact for a large unit operation was credited for each 24-hour period in which contact during that operation had been made.<sup>(9)</sup> As the Army staff pointed out, the operational day of contact



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was not a good measure of Allied military activity “. . . because an operation qualifies under this category if it has *one or more* contacts in a day (it could have had a dozen and be enumerated as one operation with contact).”(10) True enough.

(U) Aside from the problems inherent in the statistics, there were problems of inconsistent and misleading reporting. In 1968, U.S. operations in Military Region 3 were reported as a single large operation (*Toan Thang—Resolved to Win*) after April. All of the battalion-days were reported as accumulating in Tay Ninh province, although U.S. forces operated in other Military Region 3 provinces.(11) Military Region 3 also reported all U.S. operations in 1968 as being combined U.S.-Vietnamese operations, whether both nations actually participated or not.(12) Further, the Allied operations reporting from MACV did not provide a realistic breakdown of different types of operations. For example, in Military Regions 1 and 2, practically all operations in 1969 were reported as “Search and Clear.” But in Military Region 3 they were called “reconnaissance in force.”(13)

(U) Similar problems occurred in the statistics regarding small-unit actions. The first problem was the incompleteness of U.S. reporting, except that done by the Marines in Military Region 1. Ninety percent of all small-unit actions reported by U.S. forces were conducted in Military Region 1.(14) Military Region 2 simply didn't report actions by small U.S. units at all until 1969, and Military Region 3 stopped reporting them that same year, despite evidence from outside the official reporting system that small-unit actions remained prevalent there.(15) In contrast, the Vietnamese reported practically everything as a small-unit action (bridge guards, check points, routine patrols, etc.).(14) Thus, any analysis of small-unit actions from the official data is extremely difficult and any results quite uncertain, although the analysis of small-unit actions that involved actual contact is of some use.

(U) To the reader, the futility of attempting systematic analysis with the available statistics on ground operations should now be evident.

### SOME TENTATIVE FINDINGS

(U) Given the problems in handling the data covering operations on the ground, the analysts in

most early studies of Allied ground-force effectiveness had to focus on the efficiency of the various Allied forces in killing members of the VC/NVA. Later, as pacification data and methods of analyzing it developed, a broader view of the effectiveness of Allied forces came into being. Here, the focus is on inflicting casualties on the VC/NVA.

(U) The U.S. and third-nation forces tended to take over the mission of fighting the main forces of the VC/NVA when they entered the conflict. From 1965 through 1968 there was a tendency to assign the Vietnamese regular units to security missions in all the military regions except Military Region 4, where few U.S. forces were present. After the buildup of the Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces in 1969 and 1970 and the initial withdrawals of U.S. forces, the emphasis shifted to freeing the Vietnamese battalions from security duties and committing them to offensive combat against the main forces of the VC/NVA. If these two points are kept in mind, an analysis of the statistics through 1969 yields some tentative conclusions about the operations of the U.S. and Vietnamese forces on the ground in South Vietnam. But the conclusions must remain tentative, given the data problems and the inadequacy of using VC/NVA combat deaths as the primary index of effectiveness.

(U) There is some evidence that actions by the South Vietnamese troops slackened in 1966 as the U.S. and third-nation troops went into full-scale offensive combat. The RVNAF killed 20 percent fewer VC/NVA in 1966 than in 1965, although the total combat deaths among VC/NVA forces rose 50 percent during 1966.(16)

(U) Analysis of data for the period from 1966 through 1969 indicated that, man for man, the Vietnamese regular battalions were only 50 to 60 percent as effective as U.S. battalions in killing personnel of the VC/NVA. Stated another way, on an average, each man in a Vietnamese battalion got credit for killing about half as many VC/NVA troops as each man in a U.S. battalion.(17,18) *By this measurement, the Vietnamese consistently exceeded the MACV calculation that a Vietnamese battalion was equivalent to only 31 percent of a U.S. battalion.*(19) *And they did it during a period in which they were receiving only one-tenth of the artillery and tactical air support per man in a*



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*maneuver battalion that a soldier was receiving in a U.S. maneuver battalion.*<sup>(20, 21)</sup> (The Vietnamese did receive more support in later years, however.) The Vietnamese combat battalions in Military Regions 2 and 3 consistently appeared to be much less effective than those in Military Regions 1 and 4.<sup>(8, 16, 22)</sup>

(U) Except during the Tet offensive period in 1968, some 70 percent of U.S. artillery rounds were fired in situations of light or inactive combat intensity, as judged by the reporting artillery unit.<sup>(23)</sup> Expenditures of artillery ammunition in Vietnam remained fairly constant between June 1967 and June 1970, and in the latter month they were only 6 percent below the highest monthly rate ever recorded (February 1968). *Variations in the intensity of the main-force conflict (trending*

*downward from 1968 until 1972), the considerable pacification gains during 1969-70 (see Chapter XIII), and U.S. redeployments all had little apparent effect on artillery consumption during the three-year period.*<sup>(23)</sup>

(U) Clearly, analysis of Allied operations on the ground in Vietnam is an essential requirement for full understanding of that war, or any war without fronts. Unfortunately, a systematic analysis of these ground operations and their effectiveness will probably require at least as much effort as went into the rest of this book, and it will have to await the patient efforts of historians who can sift through the thousands of pages of detailed description of those operations. Even then, there may be some question as to the consistency required of the data that must be compiled if a systematic quantitative analysis is to be produced.

## Chapter VII

### Improving the Effectiveness of South Vietnamese Forces

I guess you can take men from any nation on earth, give them leadership, time to train, and produce an effective combat force.

*Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, U.S. Army (Ret.)*

(U) Wars without fronts tend to occur mostly in the less developed countries of the world, and several of them have seen the participation of forces from outside of the country, usually assisting the government (but in South Vietnam assisting both sides). One of the lessons that seems to have emerged from these wars is that indigenous troops are the ones that win, not outsiders; and if the government is to win the military side of the war, its troops have to be good enough to do it. The outsiders seldom can win for them.

(U) Developments in Vietnam indicated that, fundamentally, the capabilities of RVNAF forces and of the Government of Vietnam in general would determine the outcome, so it is fitting to look at some of the problems of the RVNAF and the progress that was made toward solving them before U.S. forces were finally withdrawn. In Chapter VI, it was noted that, even before Vietnamization had a chance to take hold, the RVNAF regular force battalions, man for man, were about half as effective as U.S. battalions—this, without the tremendous firepower and other support enjoyed by the U.S. troops. Not bad, considering the RVNAF's handicaps. The problems that we refer to, however, were not unique to the RVNAF. They occur in varying degrees in most armies, including that of the United States.

(U) This chapter focuses on the problems of the RVNAF in striving to become a fully effective combat force and on what the U.S. did or did not do about them. The concentration is on leader-

ship, training, and shortages of troops in combat units.

#### HOW THE KOREAN ARMY IMPROVED<sup>(25)</sup>

(U) After Vietnamization became U.S. policy in early 1969, members of the Systems Analysis office interviewed Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, USA (Ret.), as part of their search for ways to improve the South Vietnamese armed forces. General Ridgeway had been successful in transforming a weak and demoralized South Korean Army into an effective fighting force, and his views were sought for their possible application to the South Vietnamese forces. General Ridgeway noted that the two wars were more different than alike. He also said, "From this distance, I wouldn't presume for a minute to judge the Vietnam situation. I have never been there."<sup>(26)</sup> Nonetheless, his views were quite pertinent to the upgrading of the South Vietnamese Army, although they were not applied with much vigor.

(U) General Ridgeway's advantage in Korea was that he commanded the South Korean Army. Backed by the powerful and strong-willed President of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, General Ridgeway and his U.S. subordinates fired incompetent Korean commanders freely, replacing them with the best ones they could find. This was an enormous advantage in upgrading the South Korean Army, and General Ridgeway "never could understand why they have a dual command



in South Vietnam. Why in hell didn't they put the ARVN under Westmoreland?"<sup>(27)</sup>

(U) The principles applied by General Ridgeway in Korea are best stated by him:

The building of any military establishment into an effective combat force rests on several basic principles which are the same the world over. In general, a military establishment's effectiveness is dependent primarily on its officer corps and secondarily on its noncommissioned officer corps. Of course, weaponry is an essential, time to train is essential, but the focus must always be on the officer corps. It takes time to produce an effective combat force and there are a multiplicity of functions which have to be carried out before an armed force is effective. No amount of equipment or numbers of personnel can be substituted for the basic ingredient of leadership.<sup>(28)</sup>

What I want to stress above everything else is the foundation of an Army—its officer corps. With one, any problem can be overcome; without one, all other efforts are in vain. This is the one principle I never stopped stressing when we were building the Korean Army.<sup>(28)</sup>

And:

I told President Rhee in the presence of his Minister of Defense, "we aren't going to get anywhere with your Army until you get some leadership. You haven't got it from the Minister of Defense on down and until you get it, it's just hopeless. Don't you ask me to arm any more of your people. You've lost enough equipment now to equip six of our divisions."

This wasn't just carping criticism. These fellows had a division commander with the experience level of a U.S. Army captain and a young one at that. They just hadn't had the training and the experience. Regardless, President Rhee was tough on them. He even fired his Minister of Defense.<sup>(27)</sup>

(U) Besides leadership, General Ridgeway emphasized that continuous training is critical:

Oh yes, training is a continuing function. It should go on at all times, even during combat. In some ways, it is the finest training you can get because that is your ultimate reason for existence—to be effective in combat. Every chance we had in World War II and Korea, we trained. Started at the bottom and worked up. We took advantage of every opportunity to leave the lines and train. Some of those combat exercises in Korea were great. We put the officers of ROK divisions up on a hillside there to observe the exercise taking place in the valley. This had a tremendous effect.<sup>(26)</sup>

## LEADERSHIP

(U) Throughout the war in Vietnam, U.S. reports cited poor leadership as the South Vietnamese Army's major deficiency, but progress in resolving this problem remained unsatisfactory. The main reason was that Vietnamese officers (especially in the field-grade ranks) often owed their promotions more to political acumen than to battlefield performance,\* and it was difficult to get the South Vietnamese to remove poor officers, because of their family and political ties. Other factors also contributed to the problem. Between 1967 and 1970, the South Vietnamese forces grew by 60 percent, creating an even stronger demand for leaders, but qualified officers remained scarce. Combat losses and the diversion of military leaders into essential nonmilitary jobs further aggravated the situation. Finally, MACV was never willing to put enough pressure on the South Vietnamese to persuade them to replace the poorest military leaders with better ones. This was in sharp contrast to the pacification advisers' success in getting the South Vietnamese to put better leaders into key pacification jobs.

(U) The main key to the effectiveness of an RVNAF unit was the competence of its commander. He set the tone of the unit because his subordinates were usually reluctant to take any initiative without his lead. Also, leadership in a Vietnamese unit tended to be uneven compared to that in a U.S. unit. If a U.S. commander was killed or disabled in combat, his second in command was expected to take command and was trained to do so, and the unit continued to fight. When a Vietnamese commander was killed, his unit sometimes fell apart immediately, even though the other officers survived, because they often were not well qualified, trained leaders. Stated another way, the competence of the leaders in a U.S. unit was normally more uniform than that of the leaders in a South Vietnamese unit.

\* (U) RVNAF promotion authorities: While recommendations for annual and special promotions were made by promotion boards and unit commanders, respectively, the actual promotions were made only by the following promotion authorities: President (for general officers), Prime Minister (permanent colonel), Minister of Defense (functional colonel through permanent major), Chief, Joint General Staff (functional major and below). The Chief, JGS delegated a portion of his promotion authority to subordinate commanders. Thus, all field-grade promotions (major-colonel) had to be approved by a top authority in Saigon.



(U) An analysis in February 1970<sup>(29,30)</sup> indicated that the capability of an ARVN division commander was a key factor in the performance of all RVNAF forces in the area under his command. Unlike the case in the U.S. military forces, the ARVN division commander retained tight control of all operations and activities in his DTA (Division Tactical Area), allowing little leeway for the initiative of his subordinates. The analysis suggested that there was a close relationship between ARVN leadership and ARVN performance and that there was some effect on RF/PF (Regional Force/Popular Force) combat performance in the DTA. Divisions with good commanders had good overall leadership and good performance, while poor divisions had mediocre commanders. For example, General Truong, who commanded the ARVN 1st Infantry Division, was widely recognized as an excellent combat leader by both Vietnamese and Americans. The performance ratings and indicators showed that his division ranked first or second in almost every category when compared with all other ARVN divisions. On the other hand, the 5th and 18th ARVN Divisions had the worst performance ratings, and in August 1969, as a result of U.S. pressure, the commanders of those divisions were finally removed.

(U) In an analysis during the following month (March 1970), <sup>(31)</sup> further evidence of the association between leadership and combat effectiveness was found through analysis of the relationships among three ratings of ARVN units: combat effectiveness, leadership, and quality of personnel.\* Within each division the three ratings usually showed similar patterns, but among the divisions, the trends and their timing were quite different. The main result was a high correlation between combat effectiveness and leadership in ARVN infantry divisions, but only a moderate one between combat effectiveness and the rated quality of ARVN troops. *This suggested that improving leadership was more likely to increase combat effec-*

\* (U) SEER (the System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of RVNAF) included a quarterly report in which the U.S. advisors of battalions and higher units responded to 157 questions on various aspects of the unit, its personnel, and its operations. The analysis here is concerned with the questions and ratings pertaining to combat effectiveness, leadership, and quality of personnel. The ratings were composed of the weighted answers to selected questions. For example, personnel ratings measure the physical condition of the troops, how eager for combat and how loyal they are, how effectively morale incentives are used, and how often pay is delayed.

*tiveness than improving the quality of the troops.* Additional evidence from a regression analysis suggested that improvement of leadership would yield four times as much improvement in combat effectiveness as an equivalent increase in the quality of the troops. Precision should not be imputed to the results, but the statistical relationships between the rated quality of leadership and the rated quality of performance was fairly strong. More important, the results fit the views expressed by General Ridgeway, as well as the doctrine of the U.S. Army. *Good leadership is critical to combat performance.*

(U) If the quality of ARVN division commanders was so important, it follows that the U.S. evaluations of each commander should have been as candid and accurate as possible. Unfortunately, as Table 27 indicates, the U.S. advisors' assessments gave the impression that all of the ARVN division commanders were quite capable. Experienced observers disagreed. It is clear that the advisors' reports were not too helpful and that they had to be read as one reads efficiency reports. An "able" commander, for example, was probably inferior to an "excellent and aggressive" commander. Worse, one "highly respected and admired . . . competent general officer" was obviously nothing of the sort to those who knew him best ("coward and military incompetent").

#### IMPACT OF A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP: THE ARVN 7th DIVISION<sup>(32)</sup>

(U) The ARVN 7th Division in 1969-70 provides an example of what can happen to an ARVN division when a good leader takes command. The withdrawal of U.S. 9th Division units from Military Region 4 in the summer of 1969 left the ARVN 7th Division in charge of the area where the U.S. units had operated. It soon became apparent that the division was not up to the task it faced. Recognizing the problem, President Thieu relieved the division's commander and appointed an aggressive brigade commander (from the ARVN Airborne Division) to the job. No other measures were taken, nor was additional support furnished. The new commander quickly turned the division into an effective fighting unit, furnishing strong evidence that replacing a poor commander with a good one was the best way to improve a poor ARVN division.



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TABLE 27. Comments on ARVN division commanders. (Table unclassified.)

Commanders	DIA and Advisor Comment	Experienced Observer Comment
MS Ngo Quang Truong (1st Infantry Division) 43 months as CG	"one of the hardest working and most professionally competent officers in the Vietnamese Armed Forces... an excellent and aggressive commander..."	1. "Outstanding, aggressive commander." 2. "Terrific. Better than most US. On the go and out with units all the time. Tough on subordinates. 'In' with JGS so he gets good people and is able to promote them and hold them."
BG Nguyen Van Toan (2nd Infantry Division) 24 months as CG	"an excellent leader and intelligent, decisive, and conscientious officer who is concerned for the welfare of his troops... consistently displays his personal courage under fire to encourage his troops." (US source) "unwilling to use his troops in any way that would endanger them...rumored to be corrupt and a playboy." (Vietnamese source)	1. "Grossly overrated. Division performance is marginal. Lacks aggressiveness. Would relieve him." 2. "Super defensive. Lacked aggressiveness. Looking upward rather than down--not good to his people. Couple of very bad reports from province advisors in his area."
BG Le Ngo Trien (22nd Infantry Division) 6 months as CG	"Displays the highest moral fiber desired of a leader. Decisions made by him reflect careful analysis of the situation and matured judgment... He is highly respected by his subordinates as a good leader who is not hesitant to praise or punish when demanded by the situation...has the capability of assuming the highest office in RVNAF."	1. "Good reputation, but I don't know him. Was pleased to see Hieu relieved." (See 5th Division below.)
Col. Vo Van Canh (23rd Infantry Division) 17 months as CG	"hard-working, thorough, and highly motivated, Col. Canh is considered a well-qualified officer. Very good division commander. Strong minded, aggressive. Well grounded in tools of his trade. Accepted advice readily. Knew his strong points and weak points. Not particularly politically oriented. Ready to accept government policy; not a political can. Scheduled to be promoted to BG. Very attentive to desires of US commanders in the area. Very honest. Personally brave, ready to lead by example."	1. "Good reputation, but I don't know him." 2. "Never met him, but I recall at the time of his appointment middle grade ARVN officers were asking, 'How did this guy get in?' His reputation is not high among this group."
MG Nguyen Van Hieu (5th Infantry Division) 6 months as CG	"one of the ablest senior Vietnamese officers." Former CG of the 22nd Infantry Division.	1. "Poor as 22nd Division commander. Americans are over-impressed by his fluent English, which he learned in Malaysia." 2. "When Hieu was in the 22nd Division it was like 2nd Division performance--non-innovating and careful, even when enemy forces were depleted. Insufficient concern with the RF and PF while in the 22nd Division and conflicts with province officials."
BG Lam Quang Tho (18th Infantry Division) 6 months as CG	"He exudes self confidence and has a noticeable influence on the actions of his junior officers. He is highly respected and admired... a competent general officer."	1. "Coward and military incompetent, despite his six foot height and bearing. Was the armor commander at the crucial battle at Ap Hao, which ARVN lost." 2. "Don't know him as a division commander. Tall, good military bearing--US officers think he's great and he gives good briefings. The Vietnamese generals think he's a dud. They hate his guts. He always looks up. Doesn't aggressively carry out his duty. Rides the fence."
MG Nguyen Xuan Thinh (25th Infantry Division)	"The 25th Division, prior to the assumption of command by General Thinh, was generally considered to be worst combat unit in ARVN. Thinh has begun to make changes that will eventually improve the 25th's reputation...sets an example for his men...Improving in aggressiveness and the mastery of commanding a division."	1. "Fair commander. Clearly the 25th Division is unimpressive." 2. "Don't know enough about him to comment."
BG Nguyen Thanh Hoang (7th Infantry Division) 19 months as CG, relieved in January 1970	"a professional military officer who is highly intelligent, extremely shrewd, quick to apprehend, and is deliberate in thinking and speech. He commands the attention of his subordinates." Replaced in Jan. 1970 by Col. Nguyen Khoa Nam, former commander of the 3rd Airborne Brigade.	2. "Relieving him was a good move. He was a lousy province chief. Super defensive, indecisive. Didn't replace poor officials. Tried to do all the work himself, didn't use his staff."
BG Nguyen Khoa Nam (7th Infantry Division) 1 month as CG	"outstanding leadership ability. His full devotion seems to be being a full time soldier. His services are sought all over Vietnam...one of the great leaders in this country...one of the most competent officers I have ever known."	1. "Good reputation." 2. "Don't know him."
Col. Tran Ba Di (9th Infantry Division) 19 months as CG	"Colonel Di clearly commands the divisions, however, his leadership is weak dealing with significant failures by some of his commanders and sometimes with poor staff performance...this lack of force and aggressiveness extends to combat operations in that his units seldom take full advantage of enemy contacts by exploiting them effectively. In other respects, his competence as a commander is far above average."	1. "Better than before, but only fair." 2. "As a province chief he made such effective use of RF-PF in 1963-64 that no ARVN battalions were needed in Phong Binh or to protect Can Tho, despite the presence of substantial VC forces in the province. The Vietnamese say he is doing a good job, but the Division is in a tough area and the problems of operating the division tactically seem beyond him. Lacks the necessary experience at Division level. Would do well if he had an absolutely first rate advisor who could help him with the tactics of employing the Division."
BG Nguyen Vinh Nghi	"very intelligent. He replaces MG Nguyen Van Minh.. under Minh the 21st Division was one of South Vietnam's finest combat units."	1. "Poor commander in the 21st Division, but excellent staff officer as chief of staff in I CTZ." 2. "Slick Chief of Staff in I CTZ. Super defensive posture--put barbed wire around Bac Lieu. The Division lost lots of its old steam--I attribute this to Gen. Nghi's domineering--scares his commanders. Overrated."



(U) In the second half of 1969, the performance of the ARVN 7th Infantry Division deteriorated which it was ill-prepared. The U.S. 9th Division had c the 7th Division's tactical area for 2½ years, leaving the ARVN division to carry out defensive missions. The 7th Division had spent only 30 to 40 percent of its time on offensive combat missions during the U.S. division's tenure, about the same proportion as the Regional Forces in the division tactical area. Only one or two 7th Division battalions had participated in joint operations with U.S. forces for a few days each month, accounting for only 1 percent of the divisions' battalion-days of operation. Just before the U.S. forces left, the VC/NVA began sending reinforcements to the division tactical area, including a North Vietnamese regiment and fillers for some Viet Cong battalions. The result of all this was a dismal performance for the 7th Division during the second half of 1969. The division killed only 125 VC/NVA troops per month, 42 percent below the number killed by the Regional Forces and barely more than those killed by the Popular Forces in the division tactical area. Moreover, an entire battalion was badly mauled by a Viet Cong main-force battalion late in the year.

(U) United States advisors attributed many of the division's problems to poor leadership, Brigadier General Hoang being known for conservatism and his subordinates lacking initiative. By the end of 1969, U.S. advisors rated the 7th Division seventh in leadership and ninth in operational effectiveness among the ten ARVN divisions.

(U) Seeing the problem, President Thieu relieved General Hoang in January 1970 and installed Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Nguyen Khoa Nam, the dynamic and aggressive commander of the 3rd Airborne Brigade, as the new 7th Division commander. At the time, Colonel Nam's U.S. advisors indicated that he had "outstanding leadership ability" and judgment and that "his services are sought all over Vietnam; he has excelled in all areas." *This was the only significant change.* Support from the Vietnamese marines and other ARVN units in the division tactical area remained about the same. Tactical air support and helicopter airlift sorties declined in 1970. Helicopter gunship sorties and artillery rounds increased,

but they remained below the countrywide average for South Vietnamese regular battalions.

(U) Colonel Nam's arrival had two immediate effects on the 7th Division's performance. Its tempo of operations picked up, and its motivation and leadership improved. The division ceased its "9 to 5" pattern of operations and moved its base of operations out from My Tho and Ben Tre cities into the field. Offensive combat operations increased to 60 percent of the division's effort, up from 30 to 40 percent during the U.S. 9th Division's tenure and 45 percent after its departure. The division achieved this by passing some of its pacification and security duties to the Regional and Popular Forces. During the first half of 1970, the 7th Division achieved its highest number of VC/NVA killed (190 per month) and its highest kill ratio (3.5 VC/NVA to 1 ARVN) since the Tet offensive of 1968. For the first time since 1968, the division killed about as many VC/NVA and achieved a better kill ratio (3.5 versus 2.4 to 1) than the Regional Forces did in the division tactical area.

(U) Colonel Nam quickly gained the respect and admiration of the U.S. and ARVN officers who worked with him. He delegated authority to his regimental commanders and encouraged them to do the same in directing their battalion commanders. One of his first acts was to relieve the commander of the 12th Regiment and replace him with a newly promoted ARVN lieutenant colonel who had a good record as a ranger unit commander in Military Region 1. In May, Colonel Nam replaced the weak commander of the 11th Regiment. And the U.S. advisors reported that the commander of the 10th Regiment turned out to be a "real gem" after Colonel Nam gave him more authority. By June 1970 all three commanders were competing in a useful way.

(U) In 1970 the 7th Division took the initiative against the same VC/NVA forces that had mauled before. It prevented further inroads

against military targets. The HES/70 (Hamlet Evaluation System-1970) suggests that population "security" increased by 9 to 17 percent in the division tactical area during the first half of 1970,



compared to a 3- to 8-percent increase country-wide. At the end of June, 65 percent of the population in that division tactical area received the top security ratings,\* compared to 48 percent in the previous December, and 45 percent of the rural population was controlled by the Government of Vietnam, compared to 36 percent six months before.† While the operational success of the 7th Division had not yet reduced the overall threat to the division tactical area, HES/70 suggests that the VC/NVA forces in populated areas were steadily being reduced: On June 30 they reportedly affected only 46 percent of the population in the division tactical area, compared to 66 percent the previous December (1969). The U.S. Senior Advisor to Kien Hoa Province, where most of the increase in terrorism had occurred, stated in June 1970 that the civilian population's reaction to armed incursions by the Communists into populated areas "is encouraging" and that "it is clear that the enemy is fast losing what little voluntary popular support he may once have had."

(U) The evidence clearly indicates that Colonel Nam "turned the division around." *The lone action of putting a competent commander in charge produced these profound favorable effects. No other changes were necessary.*

### SHORTAGE OF SENIOR OFFICERS

(U) The RVNAF officer corps was bottom heavy during 1967-70 (and probably later), with too many junior officers (aspirants and lieutenants) and not enough senior officers (captains through colonels). The persistent shortage of senior officers resulted partly from the increased need for officers to fill out the expanding RVNAF force structure (up 60 percent from 1967 through 1970), as authorized billets increased faster than officer promotions.

(U) *But the main reason for the shortfall was South Vietnamese reluctance to promote officers to the important grades of captain and above.*

promoting large numbers of officers in the field grade."<sup>(33)</sup> The South Vietnamese JGS (Joint General Staff) |

| by failing to carry out its announced 1968 and 1969 promotion objectives and falling short of its 1970 objective, too. It is also significant that the Vietnamese corrected the imbalance in the noncommissioned officer corps much better than they did in the officer structure. Finally, the officer corps was bottom-heavy even before the rapid buildup began early in 1968; only half of the authorized billets for captain through colonel were filled in April of that year.<sup>(34)</sup>

(U) The evidence suggests that the RVNAF reluctance to promote officers into the senior grades was the major reason for the shortfall in these important grades. This was the product of a promotion system that responded more to the politics of the senior generals than to the needs of the professional military service. As a result, the system was unable to respond to the requirements for professional officers and to the war itself. For example, by 1970 the RVNAF still had not loosened the educational requirements for commission, nor had it ever used its quotas for battlefield promotions.<sup>(35)</sup> The steady expansion in the size of RVNAF overtook army politics, in the sense that the need for more senior officers—and hence, promotions—outstripped the capacity of the RVNAF political system to sanction such promotions.

(U) In 1970, the RVNAF promotion system provided for two general types of promotions, annual and special. Annual promotions were made on the basis of selection lists similar to those used in the U.S. Army, while special promotions were made on the basis of commanders' recommendations. A few were granted as special battlefield promotions, but *most went to individuals who had served "meritoriously" in noncombat positions.*<sup>(36)</sup> Promotions to second lieutenant (from aspirant) and first lieutenant were automatic after the required times in grade,<sup>(37)</sup> and the views of senior officers did not come into play until promotions to captain and above were considered.

(U) As already noted, in April 1968 the RVNAF had only about half of its authorized captains and above. Moreover, the number had dropped by 10 percent (800) during the previous year despite

\*HES ratings of A or B; see Chapter XIII.

†Rural Security Indicator ratings; see Chapter XIII.

‡General Vien was head of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff.



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a 20 percent increase in the regular forces.<sup>(34)</sup> Some progress is evident by the end of 1969, as the RVNAF doubled the number of senior officers (7,000 to 14,000) while the total personnel of regular and regional forces increased only 50 percent.\* But authorized appointments for captain and above increased 80 percent, and so, despite its efforts, the RVNAF was able to fill only 62 percent of the authorized billets.<sup>(38)</sup> Meanwhile the categories of aspirant and lieutenant remained "overstrength" as new entries almost kept up with new authorizations, although some progress in correcting the imbalance was seen. The category was about 25 percent above its authorized strength in April 1968,<sup>(34)</sup> and it fell to 20 percent above at the end of 1969.<sup>(38)</sup> Also, the NCO imbalances were on the way to correction.<sup>(38)</sup>

(U) Thus, despite the great increase in captains and above, this remained the lagging category. There is no way to evaluate the validity of all of the increased authorizations, and it is conceivable that the needs were inflated; but the evidence suggests that by U.S. standards the RVNAF had a significant shortage of senior officers.<sup>(39)</sup> At any rate, morale could not have been high in a service where, in June 1968, if all authorized jobs were held, 62 percent of the lieutenant colonels were holding colonel's jobs, 48 percent of the majors were holding lieutenant colonel's jobs, and 47 percent of the captains were holding major's jobs.<sup>(40)</sup>

### PERFORMANCE IN COMBAT WAS NOT THE WAY TO GET AHEAD

(U) The most difficult hurdle in developing combat leadership was that RVNAF officers had no incentive to seek combat commands, because commanders in the field were least favored for promotion. In November 1969, only 12 percent of the battalion commander billets were filled by lieutenant colonels, but more than half of *all* the billets authorized at that rank were filled by lieutenant colonels. This suggests the extent to which staff officers were promoted ahead of combat commanders.<sup>(41)</sup>

(U) Most battalion and regimental commanders were officers who were one or two ranks below the

rank authorized for the job, and in November 1969, two battalions were led by first lieutenants. Elite units such as airborne and cavalry battalions did better, even though the infantry battalions in ARVN divisions bore the brunt of the fighting. The typical infantry battalion commander in an ARVN infantry division was a captain filling a lieutenant colonel's slot, and he had 12 years of commissioned service and 13 months on the job. Airborne and cavalry units were usually led by lieutenant colonels with more experience.<sup>(41)</sup>

(U) The pattern of promotions also shows the lack of emphasis on combat performance. Battlefield commissions were rare, and MACV noted that the criteria for them were too stringent.<sup>(40)</sup> The figures support the contention. In 1966, only two battlefield promotions were granted,<sup>(42)</sup> and the following years saw little improvement. In 1967, 4 percent of the total advancements were battlefield promotions,<sup>(42)</sup> while the figure for the first half of 1968 was 5 percent<sup>(40)</sup> and for 1970 it was 2 percent.<sup>(43)</sup> The staff favorites did better: 19 percent of the promotions in 1966, twenty-six percent in 1967,<sup>(42)</sup> and 59 percent in the first half of 1968 were special nonbattlefield promotions.<sup>(40)</sup> Moreover, in 1967 the promotion boards selected for promotion only 33 percent of the officers eligible for annual promotions.<sup>(42)</sup> The emphasis on "special nonbattlefield" performance is clear. No wonder RVNAF performance in combat wasn't better!

### CORDS REPLACED POOR PACIFICATION LEADERS

(U) In October 1970, a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, observed that:

Some progress has been made in improving RVNAF combat leadership during the past year.

These changes should lead to improvements and MACV undoubtedly played a significant role in bringing them about . . . However, aside from the pacification effort, there is little sign of a systematic and continuous MACV effort to have the GVN replace poor combat commanders with good ones. The MACV-CORDS system for having better provincial and district officials appointed works quite well, but no other MACV staff section uses it.<sup>(44)</sup>

(U) The CORDS system had the following elements:<sup>(44)</sup>

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\*The Popular Forces had no officers.



TABLE 28. RVNAF maneuver battalions did not train much. (Table classified Confidential.)

	% of Total Time <sup>a/</sup>							
	1969				1970			
	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q
ARVN Infantry Battalions <sup>b/</sup>	3.2	3.4	6.5	6.9	5.9	4.8	7.7	5.7
Cavalry, Airborne, <sup>c/</sup> Ranger and Marine Battalions	N/A	N/A	4.9	6.0	4.6	4.1	11.2	7.9

a/ Reflects total time devoted by battalions to training and provides for combining the time spent by smaller units into battalion-days. Time spent on major training programs, such as national and division level training, is also included.

b/ Source: MACV SEER Report, Part I (ARVN, VNN) 4th Qtr. Cy 70., p. 86. Units are those in ARVN Infantry Divisions and Separate Regiments.

c/ Ibid., 4th Qtr Cy 70, p. C-18. 3rd Qtr. cy 70, p. C-18.  
2nd Qtr CY 70, p. C-18. 1st Qtr. cy 70, p. C-18.  
4th Qtr CY 69, p. C-19. Latest Figure taken in each case.

- (U) A CORDS agreement with President Thieu gave it the right to call his attention to officials who should be replaced. The President delegated authority in such matters to Prime Minister Khiem.
  - (U) A MACV directive written by CORDS spelled out how an advisor could try to get a Vietnamese official relieved (but it applied only to CORDS). It told the advisor how to prepare a dossier, who had authority to relieve each type of official, and what channels to use.
  - (U) Once a year each CORDS advisor prepared a dossier on his counterpart's ability and performance and sent it to an automated central file in Saigon.
- (U) If an advisor wished to have his counterpart relieved, he started the following procedure:
- (U) He prepared a dossier, citing at least three or four specific instances that justified replacement of the official.
  - (U) He passed the dossier to his U.S. province senior advisor, who checked with the province chief to see if he agreed and who expanded the dossier to include the official's basis of power, political and family connections, etc.
  - (U) The dossier then moved up to the military region level, for discussion with the military region commander.
  - (U) It was then passed to Saigon, where CORDS conducted an investigation. If

CORDS decided the advisor was correct, the head of CORDS sent a letter to the Prime Minister citing the CORDS-Thieu agreement and asking that the man be relieved. Often, he was.

(U) This system enabled CORDS to pressure the GVN to replace virtually all of the worst province and district Chiefs in 1969-70. Moreover, CORDS developed dossiers on all Vietnamese officers who had served in key pacification jobs during that time. It used them not only to fire incompetents, but to identify capable leaders for key jobs. It is difficult to understand why MACV didn't develop a comparable set of dossiers for the RVNAF combat leaders.

(U) On October 13, 1970, the Secretary of Defense, writing to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said: "I want to stress again the high priority and extreme importance I place on our efforts to improve RVNAF leadership in Vietnam." He then went on to ask: ". . . do you think that the MACV-CORDS system for replacing poor province and district chiefs could be adapted to improve the leadership of RVNAF military units?"<sup>(45)</sup> Apparently it could not, because there is no evidence that it ever was.

TRAINING OF THE RVNAF GROUND FORCES\*

(U) This analysis concentrates primarily on the training of South Vietnamese regular ground forces, the ARVN (Army) and VNMC (Marine Corps), during 1968-70. The reasons for this focus are: (1) the success of Vietnamization depended primarily on the ground forces, (2) detailed data are readily available for 1968-70, but not for later years, and (3) the Regional and Popular Forces are covered in Chapter XIV.

\*This analysis is based on Refs. 46 through 48. As noted on page 31 of the October 1969 analysis, it is also based on data derived from MACV training programs; reports on RVNAF schools and training centers; U.S. Army reports of U.S. training support for Vietnamese; comments made by the Secretaries of the Military Services and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff in their review of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program; and observations contained in U.S. Army Senior Officer debriefing reports. In addition, Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway (USA, Ret), Gen. James A. Van Fleet (USA, Ret), Maj. Gen. Cornelius B. Ryan (USA, Ret), and Brig. Gen. Arthur S. Champany (USA, Ret) were contacted to obtain background information on Korean War training programs.



MANEUVER BATTALION TRAINING

(U) Table 28 is based on the MACV SEER\* reports, and it shows the proportion of time that the maneuver battalions spent on training during 1969-70. After spending about 3 percent of their time on training in the first half of 1969, the average rose to about 6 percent for the rest of the period. *The annual cycle of combat is reflected in the figures, which show a smaller proportion of time spent on training during the first half of the year, when the fighting was at its yearly peak, than during the last half, when fighting subsided to lower levels.*

(C) Table 29 shows that 35 percent of all regular RVNAF maneuver battalions spent no time in training in 1969; 18 percent conducted 10 or less days of training; and 27 percent received more than 30 days of training.<sup>(49)</sup>

(U) Training programs for the maintenance of unit combat proficiency were conducted at training centers as unit refresher training (a four-week course for infantry battalions) or as command-supervised in-place training. Each unit was supposed to complete refresher training once every three years.<sup>(50)</sup> Figure 7 shows the percentage of ARVN infantry battalions and special units that either (1) had completed battalion refresher training between 1967 and the end of 1970, (2) were in training at the end of 1970, or (3) were overdue for refresher training on that date. The 1st and 2nd Divisions and the ranger units in Military Regions 1 and 2 were the only units who completed all of their refresher training during the three-year period.<sup>(50)</sup> An accelerated program to provide refresher training was planned for 1970, but "increased combat activity" led to cancellation of about half of the proposed training.<sup>(50)</sup> (Combat activity in 1970 was well below that in 1968 or 1969.)

(U) There is little agreement on how much unit refresher training is best, but many experienced observers do agree that it is essential for maintaining and improving the leadership, morale, spirit, and effectiveness of an army. In the Korean War, South Korean units were taken out of combat and sent to a center for systematic training, starting with the individual soldier and working up to division level exercises with live fire, but the

TABLE 29. *One-third of the RVNAF maneuver battalions received no training during 1969. (Table classified Confidential.)*

No. Maneuver Battalions <sup>a/</sup>	% of Total	No. Days Training Per Battalion	No. Bn Days Training	No. Bn Days Available
65	35	0	0	23,725
34	18	1-10	180	12,410
15	8	11-20	232	5,475
21	12	21-30	562	7,665
32	17	31-40	1576	11,670
18	10	over 40	1089	6,570
185	100		3139	67,515

<sup>a/</sup> Includes all ARVN, Ranger, Airborne and Marine maneuver battalions, plus the cavalry squadrons.

frequency of this training is not known. Experienced observers indicate that a refresher training period each year would be ideal, with the follow-up training being conducted regularly at the unit. (In 1969, the Vietnamese Marine Corps began to plan for one refresher period every two years.)<sup>†</sup>

(U) The evidence suggests that the average South Vietnamese maneuver battalion trained an average of about 3 hours per week at most. Some units didn't train at all, and others trained much less than 3 hours per week; of course, some trained more. Compared to accounts of the Korean experience, the South Vietnamese training during 1968-70 appears deficient.

(U) One of the main problems was the emphasis on recruit training because of the force buildup after 1968 and the high loss rates from casualties and desertions. This tended to fill up the national and divisional training centers, and it set back the schedule for refresher training. However, the Secretary of the Army reported that RVNAF use of training centers in the first half of 1969 was 29,000 below that which was programmed (most of the shortfall occurred during the first quarter, when the 1969 post-Tet offensive occurred),<sup>(52)</sup> so the buildup does not entirely explain the lack of emphasis on refresher training.

(C) Moreover, the record of follow-up training at the unit to improve combat skills was not good either. Advisors reported that about 17 percent of the units trained for less than 20 minutes per week, on average, during 1970.<sup>(53)</sup> About 50 percent trained for less than 2 hours per week, or an average of less than one day per month.<sup>(53)</sup> About 17 percent of the units trained about 4

\*System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of RVNAF.

<sup>†</sup>The substance of the entire paragraph is from Ref. 51.



hours per week or more.<sup>(53)</sup> Thus, not much time was devoted to the training of South Vietnamese maneuver battalions during 1969 and 1970.

(C) To compound the problem, about half of the training conducted was not very effective. In 1969, advisors rated about half of the training to improve combat skills as being ineffective or marginal.<sup>(54)</sup> In 1970, the rating system changed, and the advisors rated about 22 percent of the training as being poor and an additional 40 percent as being only fair.<sup>(53)</sup> So some units didn't train at all, and half of the training that was conducted was considered ineffective or marginal.

(C) United States advisors also reported on the training of company-grade officers and noncommissioned officers in RVNAF units. These ratings are not a direct measure of battalion training effectiveness, but they help fill in the picture of training conditions. Thirty-three percent of the company-grade officers were rated below average in training during 1968<sup>(57)</sup> and 1969.<sup>(54)</sup> About 25 percent were rated poor in 1970, after the rating system was changed (another 45 percent were only fair).<sup>(53)</sup> About half of the noncommissioned officers training was rated below average in 1968<sup>(47)</sup> and 1969,<sup>(54)</sup> with 33 percent rated poor and another 40 percent fair in 1970.<sup>(53)</sup> No trends, favorable or unfavorable, were evident.

(C) Finally, 20 to 30 percent of the advisors consistently reported that the operations staffs of the divisions, regiments, and battalions were ineffective when it came to planning and implementing training programs in 1969<sup>(56, 57)</sup> and in 1970.<sup>(58)</sup> A trend toward lower ratings was evident during 1970.

THE RVNAF TRAINING SYSTEM

(U) On paper, the RVNAF ground forces had an impressive military school and training system by 1969. Pressed on them by MACV, it was generally patterned after the U.S. Army system, and it consisted of formal schools, individual training, and unit training programs, but the system had major deficiencies.<sup>(59)</sup> The Central Training Command was not staffed to control the training effort. The system for rotating training cadre into and out of training centers didn't work. Poor instructors remained in training centers for as long as

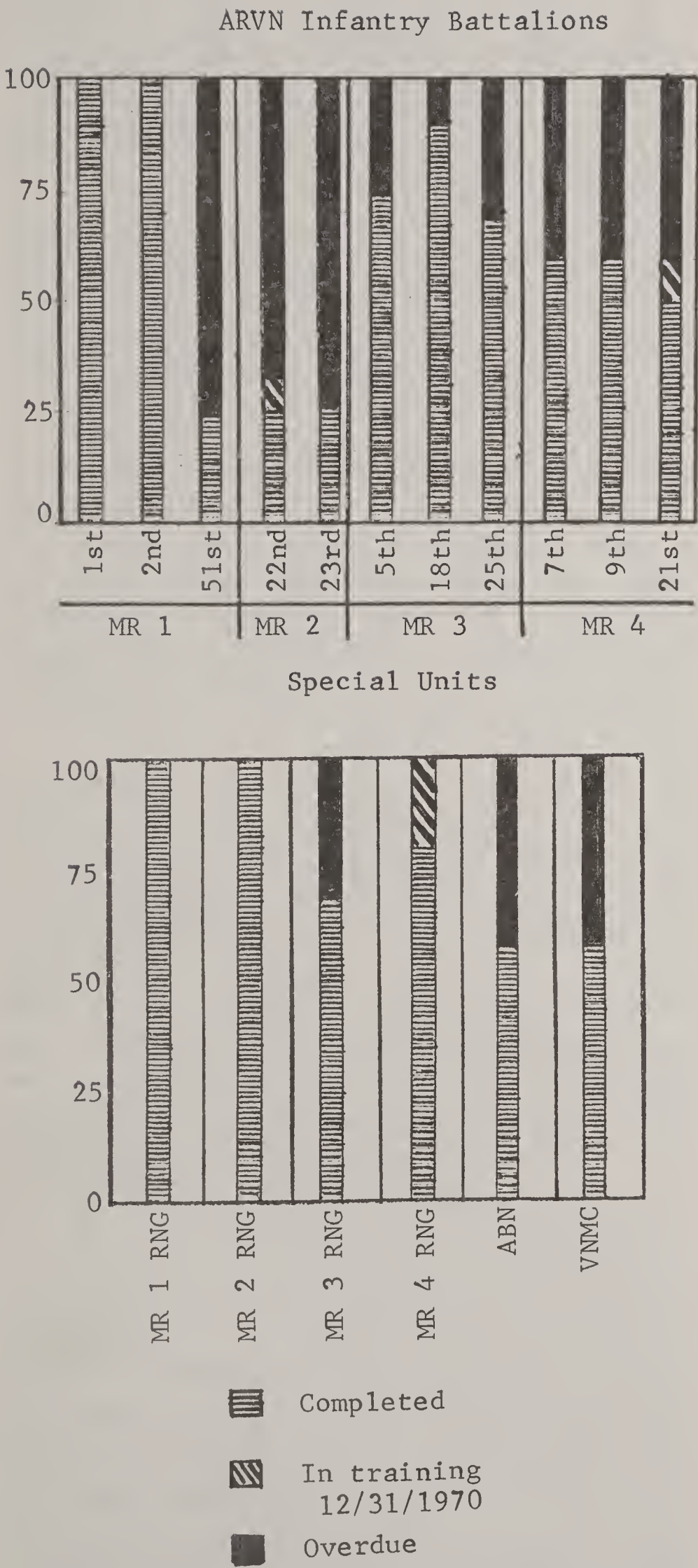


Figure 7. ARVN/VNMC refresher training. (Figure classified Confidential.)



seven years. Key officials at training centers and Service schools had no combat experience. Combat experience or lessons learned in combat were not being related to the training programs. Training facilities were inadequate. And to further compound the problems, corruption was alleged to be widespread in the training centers, with consequent effects on the recruits. To complete the picture, there was a tendency to assign incompetent division commanders to training commands after they had been fired from commanding their divisions.<sup>(60)</sup>

TRAINING COSTS

(U) Early in 1970, a U.S. plan for the RVNAF improvement and modernization program indicated that only 3 percent of 1970 funds for that program were for training. Most of these (2.7 percent) were for training the South Vietnamese Air Force. A tiny portion (0.2 percent) of the overall total was allocated to training the ground forces.<sup>(61)</sup>

(U) In sum, training in the Vietnam War obviously did not get anywhere near the priority it got in the Korean War, despite the impetus of the Vietnamization program.

COMBAT UNITS WERE SHORT OF TROOPS

(U) The inability of the South Vietnamese to keep the troop strength of their maneuver battalions and other combat units up to authorized levels was a chronic problem. True, it was also a problem for the U.S. and French armies<sup>(62)</sup>\* in Vietnam as well, but the problem was compounded in the South Vietnamese case by the lack of a system for replacing casualties and other losses in combat. High desertion rates, particularly in the regular force combat units, contributed to the problem, and rapid expansion of the RVNAF forces also was a factor. Yet, at the same time, headquarters and other rear area units were generally at much higher strength levels, suggesting that some Vietnamese were avoiding combat duty.

\*The French problem is described in the cited reference. The American problem is stated by any company or battalion commander who took his unit into combat.

TABLE 30. *The RVNAF desertion rates were stable (rates in thousands). (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Net Loss to Desertions (C)	78	116	108	127	140	176
Average RVNAF Troop Strength (C) <sup>a/</sup>	617	747	887	1017	1052	1078
% of Strength Lost to Desertions (U)	13	16	12	12	13	16

Source: Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), April 1973 and other dates, pp. 1-6.

<sup>a/</sup> Average RVNAF troop strength was calculated by adding end December through end December actual strengths and dividing by 13.

MANEUVER BATTALION STRENGTH

(U) In September 1969 the assigned strength of the South Vietnamese regular forces as a whole was 5 percent *above* their authorized strength, but the Army and Marine maneuver battalions were 13 percent *below* theirs.<sup>(63)</sup> The MACV calculated the shortage as being equivalent to 30 infantry battalions.<sup>(64)</sup> But the problem was worse than that—delays in replacements and other problems reduced the number of soldiers actually *present for duty* in the maneuver units to 35 percent below that which was authorized.

(C) A year later, in September 1970, the assigned personnel were 26 percent below the number authorized, and the maneuver units of the 9th and 21st Divisions were 37 percent below their authorized strengths.<sup>(65)</sup> The 25th Division was in the best shape, with only a 17-percent shortfall.<sup>(65)</sup> After two more years (September 1972), the maneuver units had worked their way back up to a 16-percent shortfall,<sup>(66)</sup> while the regular forces as a whole remained 5 percent overstrength.<sup>(67)</sup> The troops actually present for duty in the maneuver units were 28 percent below the authorized level.<sup>(66)</sup>

(U) Little progress in bringing the maneuver battalions up to full strength was evident, despite considerable MACV concern about the problem. *A South Vietnamese battalion normally went into combat with less than 75 percent of the troops to which it was entitled.* To add to the problem, once the unit got into a major fight for any length of time, casualty reports were neither timely nor accurate, and the RVNAF system did not furnish replacements fast enough to keep up with losses.



TABLE 31. *United States and RVNAF desertion rates; rates per 1,000 troops per month. (Table classified Confidential.)*

RVNAF	1969				1970				1971
	1st Q	2d Q	3d Q	4thQ	1stQ	2d Q	3d Q	4thQ	1stQ
Gross Desertions	11.3	12.5	11.4	10.9	10.9	12.9	13.4	11.9	12.9
Net Desertions <sup>a</sup>	10.2	11.0	10.1	9.1	9.4	11.0	11.6	9.3	10.9
<u>U.S. Army (world-wide)</u>									
Desertions	4.2	3.3	3.6	3.6	4.5	5.1	6.4	6.4	6.4
AWOL	10.7	9.0	10.1	9.1	12.1	12.8	14.7	14.7	15.7

a/ Adjusted for returns to military control.

Source: "RVNAF Desertions", *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*, June-July 1971, p. 12.

This occurred repeatedly in the highlands of Military Region 2<sup>(68)</sup> and in the Lam Son 719 operation into Laos during 1971.<sup>(69)</sup> But desertions were the worst problem.

#### THE DESERTION PROBLEM

(U) The problem of RVNAF desertions received considerable attention throughout the war, and all sorts of measures were proposed and adopted in efforts to curb the flow. *Table 30 suggests that the desertion problem was endemic and that the measures, at best, simply had the effect of maintaining the status quo. In the four "normal" years shown, 12 to 13 percent of the troops deserted. In the two years of heavy combat (1968 and 1972), the rate went up to 16 percent. The percentages suggest great stability, and no trends of any kind are apparent.*

(U) Desertions were a serious problem. In the normal years they outnumbered RVNAF combat deaths by about 6 to 1, while in the two peak years they outnumbered deaths by about 4.5 to 1. Again, the relationship is quite stable, as might be expected from the stability of the RVNAF combat death rates discussed in Chapter X. In terms of losses of personnel, then, desertions were at a more serious level than combat deaths.

(C) The regular forces accounted for about 60 percent of the desertions, with the Regional and Popular Forces accounting for about 23 percent and 17 percent, respectively.\* *More important, the ground combat units of RVNAF (20 percent of the force) accounted for 50 percent of all desertions and for 80 percent of the desertions from the regular forces.*<sup>(70, 71)</sup>

\*Calculated from the data in Refs. 70 and 71.

(C) The data indicate that 30 percent of the average ARVN (Army) combat strength deserted every year.<sup>(72)</sup> Some returned, but most did not—at least there are no records of their return. For example, in December 1971 only 9 percent of the deserters from combat units returned (27 percent of the deserters from noncombat units returned) and a year later, in December 1972, only 3 percent returned.<sup>(73)</sup> Where did they all go? Many of them apparently left the regular combat units, went home, and enlisted in the Regional Forces or Popular Forces to be closer to their homes. How many went from the ARVN to the territorial forces is not known, because the RVNAF did not develop any way of identifying deserters who joined other units.<sup>(74)</sup>

(U) *Although the desertion rates of combat units were higher than those of the other forces, a comprehensive statistical analysis covering a two-year period (1968–69) failed to show any statistical relationship between casualties suffered in a unit and the desertion rate.*<sup>(75)</sup> A study of U.S. advisors' responses to questions about the causes of desertion supports the finding, because it indicates that family-connected matters were the principal cause of desertion. Only 4 percent of the advisors' responses identified combat intensity as a cause for desertion.<sup>(76)</sup>

(U) Several Vietnamese studies, including interviews with 520 deserters, identified the following causes of desertion:<sup>(77)</sup> (1) deficiencies in leadership, (2) homesickness, (3) concern for welfare of the family, (4) inability to make the transition from the civilian to military way of life, (5) fear of hardship and danger, and (6) leniency in the treatment of deserters, which made desertion preferable to the rigors of military life. Homesickness and family hardships were the causes cited most often by the deserters. The relationship of leadership to desertions was especially apparent in combat units. Generally, units which had good leaders and good combat records had low desertion rates—for example, the 1st Infantry Division.

(U) *In sum, the ARVN and VNMC (Marine) combat units had the real desertion problem within the South Vietnamese forces. Taken as a group, these units experienced desertions at four to five times the rate for noncombat Army units and the Popular Forces, and at about three times the rate for the Regional Forces.*<sup>(74)</sup> *Family problems gene-*



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*rated most of the desertions, not fear of combat.* Whatever the cause, most desertions were apparently permanent, and they eroded the effectiveness of the regular combat units. On the other hand, the deserters who went into the Regional and Popular Forces may have increased the effectiveness of those important forces, because of their experience with the regular units.

(U) Comparing the RVNAF desertion rates to the rates for two types of unauthorized absences defined for U.S. forces (AWOL and desertion) provides a useful perspective to the Vietnamese problem. The RVNAF desertion criteria differed from those for U.S. AWOL's and desertions. A U.S. soldier was carried as being AWOL for 30 days and then was administratively designated a deserter. A Vietnamese soldier was considered a deserter if he was absent without leave for more than 15 days. Thus, if RVNAF desertion rates were not out of line with U.S. unauthorized absences, they ought to have been *higher* than U.S. desertion rates, but *below* U.S. AWOL rates.

(U) *This was precisely the case, at least from June 1969 through March 1971 (21 months), and possibly later.* Table 31 shows that the gross desertion rate for RVNAF ranged from 10.9 to 13.4 per thousand troops per month in 1969, 1970, and the first quarter of 1971. United States Army desertions (worldwide) in the same period ranged from 3.3 to 6.4 per thousand troops per month, about 30 to 50 percent of the RVNAF gross rate. *However, the U.S. rate of absence without leave climbed steadily during the period and surpassed the Vietnamese gross desertion rate for the last five quarters shown.* Additionally, the U.S. Army AWOL rate was at or

above the RVNAF *net* desertion rate for the last seven quarters (21 months) shown.

(U) United States Army data showed that the average AWOL was absent about 11 days. If a reasonable distribution above and below that average value is assumed, then a significant number of Army AWOL's would have been classified as deserters under the RVNAF criteria. *If the U.S. Army had used the 15-day criterion for deserters, Vietnamese desertions probably would have run about 30 to 40 percent higher than U.S. desertions.* However, the crux of the Vietnamese problem was the permanence of desertions. During the period shown in Table 31, only about 14 percent of the Vietnamese deserters were reported as having returned to military control. In contrast, about 60 percent of the U.S. Army AWOL's returned to military control. Of course, there is no way of determining how many of the Vietnamese deserters signed up with the territorial forces near home.

## CONCLUSION

(U) It seems clear in retrospect that the MACV could profitably have put more emphasis on improving RVNAF from the very beginning of the large U.S. involvement in 1965. Really serious efforts did not get under way, except in the area of pacification, until the Vietnamization program began in earnest early in 1969. The RVNAF made some progress in solving its problems, but never really got serious about it. It was a fairly good fighting force of more than 1 million troops by the time the last U.S. troops pulled out, but it was not going to be good enough.



## Chapter VIII

### The Air War

(U) In a war without fronts there is a temptation to use all the air power available to the government forces for strikes at the hundreds of fleeting targets offered by the insurgents. And in such operations, the amount of air power employed will depend primarily on the number of aircraft ready to fly. It is not often realized how large a role the U.S. and South Vietnamese air operations played in the Allied attrition strategy. (The program budget in Chapter III suggests the extent of the emphasis.) The *bulk* of these air operations was directed broadly at supporting the attrition strategy in South Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, not, as was commonly believed, at North Vietnam.

(U) This analysis focuses on the remarkably extensive—and expensive—U.S. and South Vietnamese operations by fixed-wing combat aircraft in Southeast Asia, including the B-52 bombers. It does not cover helicopter operations or the operations of the fixed-wing aircraft (C-130, etc.) that moved troops and supplies. Nor does it cover the North Vietnamese air force, which operated almost exclusively in defense of North Vietnam.

#### SIZE AND COSTS

(U) These Allied air operations were enormous in size and cost. United States and South Vietnamese fixed-wing aircraft flew about 3.4 million combat sorties in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia during the period from 1965 through 1972. The costs ran into the billions of

dollars, with the full program budget costs being probably about \$14 billion for the three-year fiscal period 1969-71.\* In December 1967, the incremental costs of bombing North Vietnam in 1968 were estimated to be about \$2.2 billion.<sup>(78)</sup> In mid-1970, it was estimated that the incremental costs of the U.S. and South Vietnamese fixed-wing combat air operations in South Vietnam and Laos were about \$3.4 billion in fiscal 1970.<sup>(79)</sup>† Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps losses of fixed-wing aircraft to hostile actions and accidents cost about \$5 billion.<sup>(80)</sup>‡

(U) The total costs of the air effort are not readily available, but the cost estimates given above are enough to indicate that this was the largest and costliest air effort in the history of warfare. Fortunately, the cost in U.S. lives was fairly low, considering the size of the effort. Only 3 percent of the U.S. deaths in the Vietnam War resulted from the operations of fixed-wing aircraft (see Chapter XI).<sup>(81)</sup>

#### SORTIE LEVELS, TRENDS, AND LOCATIONS

(U) Table 32 displays the numbers of sorties by fixed-wing aircraft and trends for the U.S. and South Vietnamese Air Forces in Southeast Asia, and it is seen that after the U.S. buildup in 1965,

\*Based on air force costs of Navy and Air Force shown in Tables 7, 8, and 9 of Chapter III.

†Support for the Royal Laotian Air Force was subtracted from the estimate shown in the reference cited.

‡Flyaway costs of procuring the lost aircraft; includes noncombat aircraft.



TABLE 32. About 3.4 million combat sorties were flown in Southeast Asia in the period 1965-72; figures in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
U.S. Attack:								
Tactical Aircraft (C)	103	254	320	372	300	193	122	167
B-52 (C)	1	5	10	21	19	15	13	28
Other Combat Tactical Aircraft Sorties a/	54	135	177	197	217	177	125	116
Sub-Total (C)	158	394	507	590	536	385	260	311
VNAF								
Attack (C)	23	32	30	23	33	38	43	53
Other Combat Tactical Aircraft (C) Sorties a/	1	1	4	2	1	1	15	11
Sub-Total (C)	24	33	34	25	34	39	58	64
TOTAL								
Attack (C)	127	292	360	416	352	246	178	248
Other a/ (C)	55	137	181	199	218	178	140	127
Total (C)	182	427	541	615	570	424	318	375

Sources: Tables 34, 35, and 36, which follow.

a/ "Other" sorties include combat air patrol (CAP, escort, reconnaissance, and other non-attack sorties.

the two forces together averaged 465,000 combat sorties per year. As indicated above, the total was about 3.4 million; and of these, the U.S. flew more than 90 percent. The total number of sorties grew each year to their peak of 614,000 in 1968, and then they declined (as the U.S. forces withdrew) until 1972, when the U.S. and VNAF sortie rates increased to meet the Communist offensive. *The total number of U.S. tactical aircraft sorties (attack plus other types) in all of Southeast Asia increased only 15 percent in 1972, but the B-52 sorties doubled (up 115 percent).* In both cases, the percentage increases within South Vietnam itself were much larger. The impact of Vietnamization began to show in 1970, when the VNAF tactical air sorties increased for the first time, continuing to increase in 1971 and 1972. In 1968, the Vietnamese flew only 4 percent of the sorties, but in 1972 they flew 13 percent. *The B-52 sorties were emphasized more and more as the time passed.* And as a percentage of the U.S. attack sorties, they increased every year, from 2 percent in 1966 to 15 percent in 1972.

(U) Table 33 shows the locations of targets, and it is seen that South Vietnam received the largest number of sorties, not North Vietnam or Laos. Approximately 45 percent of all combat sorties were flown in South Vietnam, while 22 percent were flown in North Vietnam, 28 percent in Laos, and 4 percent in Cambodia.

TABLE 33. Almost half of the U.S. and VNAF combat sorties were flown in South Vietnam; sorties in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
South Viet-Nam (C)	105	203	261	307	289	159	74	175
North Viet-Nam (C)	61	147	191	172	37	37	24	106
Laos (C)	16	77	89	136	242	186	159	69
Cambodia (C)	-	-	-	-	2	42	61	25
Total	182	427	541	615	570	424	318	375

Sources: Tables 34, 35, and 36, which follow. Cambodia totals include the "secret" sorties previously reported as being in South Viet-Nam.

(U) The results of the interdiction campaigns are best illustrated by the U.S. air operations in North Vietnam and southern Laos. These two target areas together consistently accounted for about half of the sorties, but the distribution between them shifted each time the rules of engagement changed. When political decisions allowed North Vietnam to be bombed, most of the sorties went there, but when they didn't the sorties shifted to Laos. The shift into Laos is seen clearly in 1969, after the November 1968 bombing halt in North Vietnam. When bombing in North Vietnam was permitted again in 1972, the sorties shifted back into that area from Laos. In 1972, when Laos and North Vietnam were both off limits, the available sorties simply swung into Cambodia until there, too, the bombing was halted.

(U) Thus, the distributions and rates of out-of-country interdiction sorties apparently depended

TABLE 34. The United States flew more than 80 percent of the combat sorties flown in South Vietnam; sorties in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
U.S.								
Attack:								
Tactical Air (C)	66	125	170	205	155	76	16	80
B-52 (C)	1	4	7	17	11	4	2	19
Other (C)	14	41	50	60	89	50	22	20
Total (C)	81	170	227	282	255	130	40	119
VNAF								
Attack (C)	22	32	30	23	33	28	31	49
Other (C)	2	1	4	2	1	1	3	7
Total (C)	24	33	34	25	34	29	34	56
Total								
Attack (C)	89	161	207	245	199	108	49	148
Other (C)	16	42	54	62	90	51	25	27
Grand Total (C)	105	203	261	307	289	159	74	175

Sources: Table 1304, October 3, 1974, and Table 1322, May 13, 1974, both prepared by the Department of Defense, OASD (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.



TABLE 35. Vietnamization improvement showed up as VNAF sorties in Cambodia. (Table classified Confidential.)

Sorties in Cambodia (000)	1969	1970	1971	1972
U.S.		(C)	(C)	(C)
Attack:				
Tactical Air (C)		15	17	7
B-52 (C)	2	3	1	2
Other (C)		14	19	8
Total (C)	2	32	37	17
VNAF				
Attack (C)	-	10	12	4
Other (C)	-	0	12	4
Total	-	10	24	8

Sources: Table 1304, October 3, 1974 and Table 1323, July 19, 1974, both prepared by the Department of Defense, OASD (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.

more on the numbers of sorties potentially available with the aircraft in the theater than on strategy or considerations of the relative effectiveness of the sorties among the target areas. Probably the best analogy would be the use of a fire hose, running under full pressure most of the time and pointed with the same intensity at whichever area is allowed, regardless of its relative importance in the scheme of things. In the words of Sen. Stuart Symington: "In fact, as the general just said—which I knew—orders were that if you do not need the planes against Vietnam, use said planes against Laos."<sup>(82)</sup>

(U) Table 34 shows the combat sorties flown in South Vietnam for the eight-year period of 1965–72. After the U.S. buildup in 1965, the U.S. and VNAF aircraft together flew an average of 210,000 combat sorties per year in South Vietnam for the next seven years or, as noted above, 45 percent of the total flown in all of Southeast Asia. The United States flew 83 percent of the sorties in South Vietnam, but this percentage changed significantly as the tempo of combat there declined between 1968 and 1971 and as Vietnamization took hold. In 1968, the United States flew 92 percent of the sorties. By 1971, the percentage had dropped to 54 percent, because U.S. sortie rates dropped 70 percent, while the VNAF rates went up about 10 percent. The real effect of improvement in the VNAF shows in 1972, when U.S. sorties tripled, but still were able to account for only 68 percent of the total. *The effects of Vietnamization on the VNAF sortie rates do not show up in South Vietnam until 1972, because the earlier gains simply provided the VNAF sorties flown in Cambodia from 1970, as shown by Table 35.*

TABLE 36. When the rules forbade bombing in North Vietnam, the sorties were switched to Laos until the rules permitted bombing in the north again. (Table classified Confidential.)

Sorties (000)	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
North Viet-Nam								
Attack:								
Tactical Air (C)	26	81	106	92	c/	1	2	46
B-52 (C)	-	b/	1	1	-	-	-	4
Other (C)	35	66	84	79	37	36	22	56
Total	61 <sup>a/</sup>	147 <sup>a/</sup>	191 <sup>a/</sup>	172	37	37	24	106
Attack:								
Tactical Air (C)	10	48	44	75	144	101	88	34
B-52 (C)	-	1	2	3	6	8	9	3
Other (C)	6	28	43	58	92	77	62	32
Total	16	77	89	136	242	186	159 <sup>d/</sup>	69 <sup>d/</sup>

Sources: Table 1304, October 3, 1974, Table 1321, July 19, 1974, and Table 1323, July 19, 1974, all prepared by the Department of Defense, OASD (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.

- a/ VNAF flew the following sorties in North Viet-Nam: 1965 - 563 attack and 274 other; 1966 - 814 attack and 6 other; 1967 - 127 attack.
- b/ The U.S. flew 280 B-52 sorties in North Vietnam in 1966.
- c/ The U.S. flew 286 attack sorties in North Viet-Nam in 1969.
- d/ The VNAF flew 364 attack sorties in Laos during 1971 and 383 attack plus 2 other sorties there in 1972.

(U) Table 36 shows again the relationship between the sortie rates flown in Laos and North Vietnam. When the rules forbade attack sorties in North Vietnam, the sorties switched to Laos, until the rules allowed bombing in North Vietnam again. Together, Laos and North Vietnam consistently accounted for about 50 percent of the U.S. and VNAF combat sorties flown in Southeast Asia, but the distribution of sorties between the two countries varied with the rules of engagement.

(U) After halting the bombing campaign against North Vietnam in late 1968, the United States continued to fly 2,000 to 3,000 reconnaissance and other nonattack sorties per month over North Vietnam, in accordance with the "understandings" that accompanied the bombing halt. The few attack sorties shown during that period and in 1971 were presumably the protective reaction strikes by escorts protecting reconnaissance aircraft that had been fired upon. Because of the tough antiaircraft defenses in Laos and North Vietnam, the attack sorties there required more escort and protection than in South Vietnam. In the years of active bombing of the north, only 52 percent of the sorties were attack sorties. The figure for Laos was 59 percent and for South Vietnam, 73 percent.



CONFIDENTIAL

TABLE 37. *The B-52 bomber sorties peaked in 1972. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
South Viet-Nam (C)	1320	4290	6609	16,505	11,494	3697	2386	19,289
North Viet-Nam (C)	-	280	1364	686	-	-	-	4,440
Laos (C)	18	647	1713	3,377	5,567	8500	8850	2,799
Cambodia (C) <sup>a/</sup>	-	-	-	-	2,437	2906	1319	1,855
Total (C)	1338	5217	9686	20,568	19,498	15103	12555	28,383

Sources: For 1966 through 1972: Table 1304 (October 3, 1974), and Tables 1320, 1321, 1322, 1323, Sorties and Losses, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate of Information Operations, May 13, 1974 and July 19, 1974. For 1965: "An Appraisal of ARC LIGHT (B-52) Operations", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, September 1967, p. 25.

<sup>a/</sup> Includes the "secret" bombing in Cambodia during 1969 and 1970.

## B-52 OPERATIONS

(U) The B-52 sorties are separately identified in Tables 32 through 36 to provide a comprehensive view of the air combat effort. Interest in B-52 strikes during the war and their costs were both high enough to call for separate treatment here, before we go on to an analysis of the effectiveness of the tactical air operations.

(U) The *Arc Light* program, B-52 strikes in Southeast Asia, started on June 18, 1965 with 27 sorties against targets in South Vietnam; and an average of 220 sorties per month were flown during the rest of 1965. In December 1965, targets were struck in Laos for the first time. North Vietnamese targets near the Demilitarized Zone were added in April 1966, and the DMZ itself was first hit in July 1966. The B-52's were all based at Anderson Air Base, Guam until April 11, 1967, when strikes were launched from U Tapao, Thailand.<sup>(83)</sup>

(U) Table 37 displays the numbers of B-52 sorties by target country for 1965 through 1972. It shows that, in absolute terms, B-52 sorties increased until 1968 and then declined slowly until 1972, when they rose 125 percent to the highest level ever. The increased use of B-52's as a proportion of the total air effort has already been noted above.

*South Vietnam accounted for 58 percent of all the B-52 sorties flown in Southeast Asia. Laos was second with 28 percent and Cambodia third with 8 percent. North Vietnam was the target of 6 percent of the sorties, and two-thirds of those were flown in 1972.*

## ANALYSIS OF TACTICAL AIR OPERATIONS

(U) In mid-1970, Allied tactical air operations in Southeast Asia were analyzed to examine their effectiveness and their impact on VC/NVA activities and Vietnamization. The main findings are summarized below as an introduction to the analysis that explores the points in detail:<sup>(84)</sup>

(C) *Close Air Support in South Vietnam.* Only 4 percent of the total air effort in Southeast Asia was flown in support of Allied troops in contact with VC/NVA units in South Vietnam. Most of the remaining sorties interdicted known or suspected VC/NVA locations, roads, and supply storage areas.

(C) *Interdiction in Southern Laos.* Air operations over the Laotian panhandle struck at a flow of Communist supplies from North Vietnam equal to only about 15 percent of the total VC/NVA supply requirements in South Vietnam. Even



# CONFIDENTIAL

TABLE 38. *Approximately 10 percent of the sorties in South Vietnam supported Allied troops in contact with the VC/NVA. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	Attack Monthly Sorties (Jul 69 - Mar 70)	Percentage of Total
(C) <u>Support of Allied Troops in Contact (TIC)</u>		
From Strip Alert Aircraft	722	6
From Preplanned Strikes	329	3
From Armed Reconnaissance Missions	21	—
Total	1,072	
(C) <u>Immediate Strikes (Other than TIC)</u>		
Known Enemy Locations	1,851	15
Suspected Enemy Locations	778	6
Preparation of Allied Positions	203	2
Anti-Aircraft Sites	222	2
Total	3,054	25
(C) <u>Preplanned Strikes (Not-Diverted)</u>		
Known Enemy Locations	3,470	28
Suspected Enemy Locations	3,996	32
Preparation of Allied Positions	708	5
Anti-Aircraft Sites	164	1
Total	8,338	66
(C) <u>Total Sorties</u>	12,464	100

Source: "Southeast Asia Tactical Aircraft Operations", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1970, p. 22, (Based on USAF DASCLOG Computer File).

with the intensive bombing, the VC/NVA still moved supplies that were adequate to continue, or increase, its operations.

(C) *Northern Laos.* About 75 percent of U.S. air support for the Royal Laotian forces in Northern Laos struck logistic targets; yet the flow of supplies into northern Laos consistently exceeded by a significant margin the requirements of Communist forces there. North Vietnamese manpower requirements and casualties in this area were not a significant drain on the total manpower pool.

(C) *Communist Bloc Support to North Vietnam.* Air operations imposed no critical materiel costs on North Vietnam, since its allies paid for most of the resources destroyed. North Vietnam's foreign aid during the three years up to 1970 was two to three times as large as the costs of keeping her forces in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos supplied *and* replacing the damage caused by the bombing of North Vietnam.

(U) The tactical air operations performed two primary missions, close air support and interdiction of troop and supply movements.

## CLOSE AIR SUPPORT

(U) The objective of close air support was to furnish fire support to the troops on the ground

quickly when they needed it. However, only a small proportion of the sorties were needed for this purpose. Approximately 10 percent of the fixed-wing air strikes in South Vietnam were flown to support Allied forces in contact with Communist forces.\* Another 25 percent responded to requests for "immediate" strikes on targets of opportunity (for example, VC/NVA troops, occupied base camps, antiaircraft sites, etc.). Most of the remaining sorties (two-thirds of the total) were preplanned 24 hr or more in advance, and they struck known or suspected Communist locations, roads, and supply storage areas (see Table 38).

(U) If one extrapolates from these figures, it seems likely that no more than 25 percent of all the attack sorties flown in Southeast Asia were closely linked to combat taking place on the ground or to freshly sighted targets.† This suggests that most of the enormous tactical air effort in Southeast Asia concentrated on interdicting supplies and, occasionally, personnel movements.

(U) Table 39 suggests that interdiction had even taken some priority over close air support for South Vietnamese troops. *RVNAF units in South Vietnam received less air support than U.S. units—only about 60 percent as many sorties per battalion and 25 percent as many per man killed in action in 1969 and early 1970.* The table also indicates that support for both U.S. and RVNAF troops in contact used about 10 percent of the total sorties received. Finally, RVNAF's share of the total air support for U.S. forces and the RVNAF rose from 33 percent in early 1969 to 43 percent in early 1970, as Vietnamization began to take effect with the withdrawal of U.S. units.

## THE INTERDICTION CAMPAIGNS

(U) As already noted, the interdiction campaigns are best shown by the U.S. air operations in Laos and North Vietnam, although as just seen, probably 75 percent of the sorties flown in South Vietnam are best characterized as interdiction. It has also been shown that the distribution and rates of interdiction sorties in Laos and North Vietnam

\*Only 4 percent of the Southeast Asia total.

†The pattern for artillery fire is the same. In fiscal 1968 and 1969, except for the Tet 1968 period, about 70 percent of all U.S. artillery rounds were fired in a situation of light or inactive combat, as judged by the reporting artillery unit. See Chapter VI.



TABLE 39. South Vietnamese troops received less air support than the U.S. units. (Table classified Confidential.)

(Jan 69 - Feb 70)		
	Support for Troops in Contact with VC/NVA	Total Air Support Received
(C) Total Attack Sorties Received Per Month		
RVNAF	514	4,639
U.S.	939	8,130
RVNAF as % of U.S.	55%	57%
(C) Total Attack Sorties Per Person Killed in Action		
RVNAF	0.3	3.0
U.S.	1.3	11.3
RVNAF as % of U.S.	24%	25%
(C) Total Attack Sorties Per Battalion <sup>a/</sup>		
RVNAF	5	46
U.S.	9	81
RVNAF as % of U.S.	56%	57%

Source: "Southeast Asia Tactical Aircraft Operations", Southeast Asia  
Analysis Report, June-July 1970, page 24.

a/ For these calculations assume one RVNAF battalion equates to 0.6 U.S.  
battalions.

depended more on the numbers of sorties available than they did on strategy. The important question, however, is not how the sorties were allocated, but how effective they were.

(U) As most often stated, the objectives of the operations in Laos, North Vietnam, and later, Cambodia were:

- (U) To impose a ceiling on VC/NVA combat activity in South Vietnam by reducing the flow of supplies below the amounts required to support high activity levels, the primary concern being the Communist ability to launch an offensive serious enough to upset Vietnamization.
- (U) To promote a settlement by imposing a meaningful cost on the North Vietnamese in terms of their materiel and human resources (to be meaningful, the costs had to be at or near maximum levels that the North Vietnamese were willing to sustain).

(U) All of the estimates of supply flows down through North Vietnam are uncertain, and among the least certain are the amounts estimated to have been destroyed by air strikes. Nonetheless, extensive analysis suggests the following tentative conclusions:

- (U) The VC/NVA probably received about 70 percent of its supplies for operations in South Vietnam from sources inside the coun-

TABLE 40. Foreign aid to North Vietnam exceeded the cost of supplying the VC/NVA forces. (Table classified Confidential.)

(\$ Millions)			
Calendar Year			
(C)	1967 (C)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)
(C) COSTS			
Costs of Supplies Shipped To: <sup>a/</sup>			
Northern Laos	53	61	58
Southern Laos	45	63	60
Total	98	124	118
Costs of Trucks Destroyed: <sup>b/</sup>			
Northern Laos	1	1	3
Southern Laos	6	44	38
Total	7	45	41
Costs of Supplies, Equipment, and Industry Destroyed in North Viet-Nam <sup>c/</sup>	139	85	-
Costs of Air Defense in North Vietnam <sup>d/</sup>	235	122	83
TOTAL COSTS	479	376	242
(C) AID			
Total Foreign Aid to North Viet-Nam: <sup>d/</sup>			
Economic	380	480	470
Military	650	395	220
TOTAL AID	1,030	875	690
COMPARISONS			
Total Costs as % of Foreign Aid	46%	43%	35%
Total Costs as % of Military Aid	74%	95%	110%

Source: "Southeast Asia Tactical Aircraft Operations", Southeast Asia  
Analysis Report, June-July 1970, p. 29.

- a/ Computer from CIA estimates of supply shipments and estimated costs per ton of supplies of \$1,300 for Northern Laos and \$1,100 for Southern Laos.
- b/ Computed from DIA estimates of truck attrition and estimated cost of \$6,000 per vehicle.
- c/ OASD/SA estimates, based on several earlier studies.
- d/ CIA/DIA estimates.

try. About 15 percent of its supplies was estimated to come from North Vietnam over the supply routes through Laos, target of the primary air interdiction effort.

- (U) About one-third of all supplies shipped into Southern Laos were estimated to have made it into South Vietnam through 1970. The rest were estimated to be destroyed by air strikes, consumed in transit, or stockpiled in Laos. After 1970, the Allies may have done better because of the truck-killing C-130 gunships that were so effective operating at night, but the Communists still managed to move enough supplies and manpower south to keep the war going and to launch another major offensive in 1972, although the most intense fighting was supplied largely through North Vietnam across the DMZ.
- (U) Apparently, there were plenty of supplies to ship, because the estimated flow of imports into North Vietnam was 20 times the size of estimated supply shipments from North Vietnam into Laos.

(U) These conclusions seem to suggest that the more than 1.5 million sorties flown in the out-of-country interdiction campaign did not choke off VC/NVA combat activity in the south. They probably did impose a ceiling, but it was pretty high.



TABLE 41. *Emphasis on targeting trucks in southern Laos boosted the VC/NVA losses. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	Dry Season Nov 68-April 69	Wet Season May 69-Oct 69	Dry Season Nov 69-Apr 70
(C) <u>Targets Struck</u> (average monthly sorties)			
Moving Vehicles	1,826	751	2,471
Storage Areas and Truck Parks	4,261	3,377	2,562
Roads <sup>a/</sup>	4,747	2,101	2,105
Anti-Aircraft	730	300	1,006
Other	609	976	1,009
Total Sorties	12,173	7,505	9,153
(C) <u>Estimated Supply Destruction<sup>b/</sup></u>			
Tons Destroyed (000's)	26.8	8.4	31.9
Tons per Sortie	0.37	0.19	0.58

Source: "Southeast Asia Tactical Aircraft Operations", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1970, p. 307.

a/ LOC's, Traffic Control Points.  
b/ USAF Estimate.

(U) What about the second objective—to impose a meaningful cost on the North Vietnamese? Here, too, the apparent results were not too encouraging. Table 40 suggests that the air operations probably did not impose critical materiel costs on North Vietnam, since its allies paid for most of the resources destroyed. *North Vietnam's estimated foreign aid during 1967-69 was two or three times as large as the costs of keeping its forces in South*

TABLE 42. *Gunships were at least six times as effective in truck kills per sortie as other aircraft. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	Reported Bomb Damage Per Sortie	Estimated Supplies Destroyed Per Sortie
(C) <u>Results From Truck Attacks</u>	<u>Trucks Destroyed/ Damaged</u>	<u>Tons</u>
High-Performance Jets <sup>a/ b/</sup>	0.27	0.67
Slow-Moving Attack Aircraft <sup>a/ c/</sup>	0.37	0.92
Aircraft Gunships <sup>a/ d/</sup>	2.40	5.99
Total From Truck Attacks <sup>e/</sup>	0.35	0.86
(C) <u>Results From Storage Area/Truck Park Attacks</u>	<u>Secondary Fires/ Explosions</u>	<u>Tons</u>
All Aircraft <sup>f/</sup>	1.64	0.61

Source: "Southeast Asia Tactical Aircraft Operations", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1970, p. 31.

a/ Results during randomly selected time periods of 1969-70 dry season.  
b/ F-4, F-100, F-105, A-4, A-6, A-7.  
c/ A-1  
d/ AC-119, AC-123, AC-130.  
e/ Calculated first by assuming 55 percent of trucks are loaded and carry 3.8 tons of supplies and second by adding 0.187 tons per truck-related secondary fire or explosion (under the assumption that 50 percent of truck-related secondaries result from roadside caches not cargo in trucks).  
f/ Results achieved by all tactical aircraft from November 1969 to April 1970. Calculated by assuming each secondary fire or explosion associated with an air strike against a storage area target means 0.375 tons of supply destruction.  
g/ November 1969-April 1970.

*Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos supplied and replacing the damage in North Vietnam caused by the bombing.*

(U) The results indicate that Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was correct when he stated in November 1966: "A substantial air interdiction campaign is clearly necessary and worthwhile. . . . But at the scale we are now operating, I believe our bombing is yielding very small marginal returns, not worth the cost in pilot lives and aircraft."<sup>(85)</sup>

INTERDICTION TARGETING AND  
AIRCRAFT EFFECTIVENESS

(U) Table 41 shows the relative emphasis of strikes in southern Laos against trucks, roads, and supply storage areas and the resulting effectiveness in destroying supplies. During the 1969-70 dry season interdiction program, the United States shifted its target emphasis to moving vehicles, increasing these strikes from 15 percent of the total in the 1968-69 dry season to 27 percent of the total a year later. The shift destroyed about 20 percent more supplies and increased the average amount of destruction *per sortie* by 55 percent.

(U) The increased supply destruction resulted largely from more trucks destroyed, which stemmed from the large increase in truck-kill sorties and the addition of highly effective gunship aircraft (AC-119's and AC-130's) to the interdiction force. Table 42 suggests that the gunships were at least six times as effective in truck kills per sortie as the other types of aircraft, but on the other hand they did require significant numbers of tactical aircraft as escorts on their missions.

AIR SUPPORT FOR ROYAL LAOTIAN  
OPERATIONS

(U) The objectives of air operations in northern Laos were to help limit the capability of the VC/NVA to advance during the dry season and to impose meaningful costs on Communist efforts. Table 43 compares North Vietnamese supply losses and combat deaths in northern Laos with losses in other theaters and with available North Vietnamese resources. It suggests that Allied air operations in northern Laos had little impact on



TABLE 43. *Impact of Allied operations in northern Laos. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	Monthly Average Rates FY 1970
(C) VC/NVA Personnel Losses	
Total VC/NVA casualties in Northern Laos	10-12,000
As percentage of VC/NVA casualties in South Viet-Nam	8-10%
Number Years of Available Manpower Reserves in NVN at Above Loss Rate	14 years
(C) Enemy Supply Losses	
Total supply losses in North Laos (tons)	450-900
As Percentage of supply losses in South Laos	20-40%
As percentage of supply inputs to North Laos	12-25%

Source: "Southeast Asia Tactical Aircraft Operations", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1970, p. 35.



Figure 8. South Vietnam defoliation missions, January 1965 to February 1971. (Figure classified Confidential.)

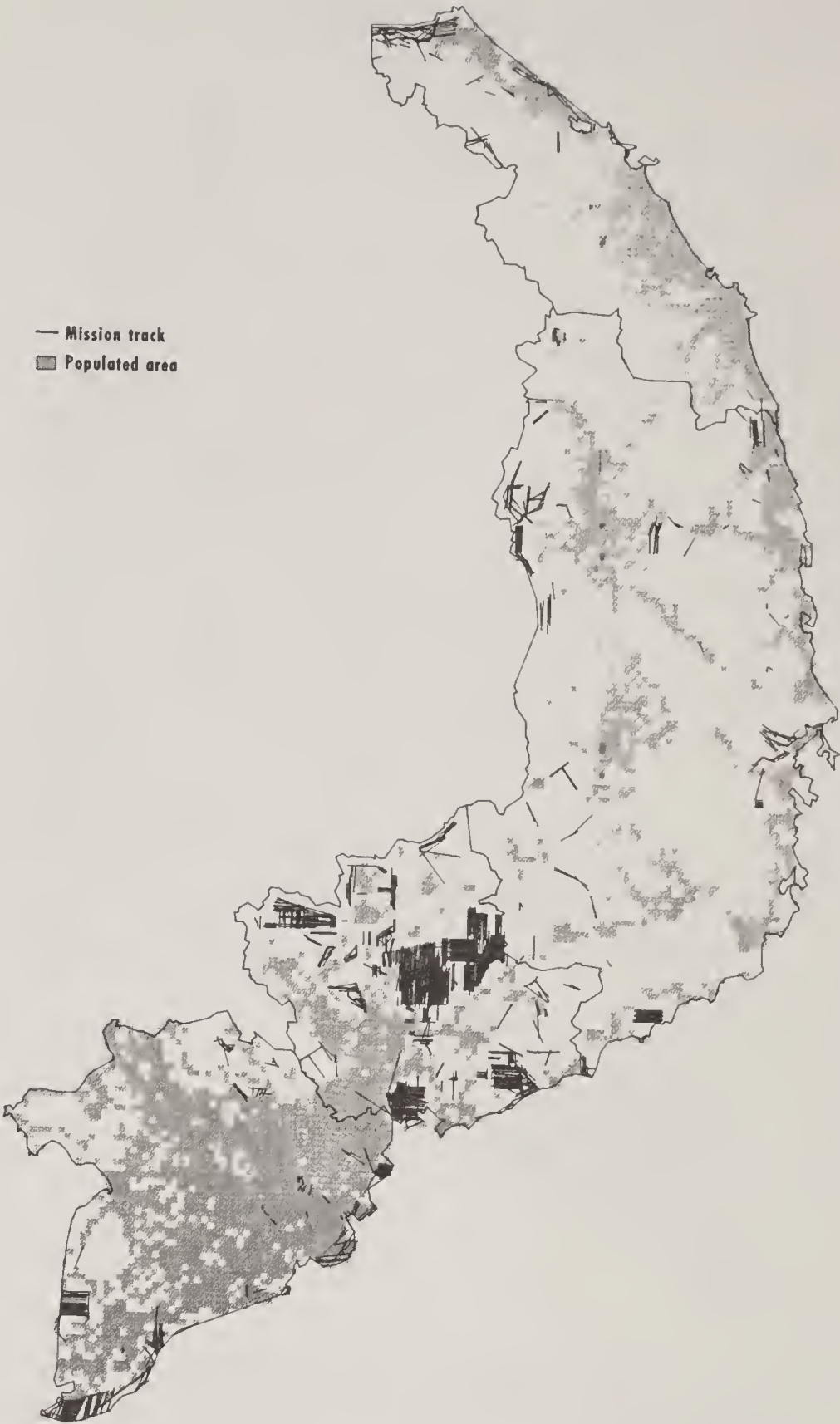


Figure 9. South Vietnam defoliation missions, January to December 1967. (Figure classified Confidential.)

available North Vietnamese manpower or supply flows. Losses are small relative to those in other theaters and to available manpower and supplies.

THE BOMBING CONCLUSION

(U) When the political impact of the bombing is added to its other costs, the effectiveness of the way the air war was conducted is open to question. Indeed, the military themselves kept pointing out how political constraints impeded the optimum use of airpower. But these constraints applied mostly to North Vietnam and Cambodia. No comparable restraints existed in South Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, where the vast bulk of the sorties were flown.





Figure 10. South Vietnam crop destruction missions, January 1965 to February 1971. (Figure classified Confidential.)

### THE SPECIAL CASE OF HERBICIDE SPRAYING OPERATIONS

(U) Two of the most controversial U.S. operations in South Vietnam were the programs to defoliate vegetation and to destroy crops. The controversy reached such a fever pitch by the end of 1970 that the spraying of crops and use of the herbicide called Orange (alleged to be harmful to humans) were stopped by order of the Deputy Secretary of Defense early in 1971. Another result was a directive from Congress to the Department of Defense to fund a study of the effects of herbicides in Vietnam by the National Academy of Science. This study is now available to interested readers and is not dealt with here.<sup>(86)</sup> Nor is a defense of the herbicide program attempted. The size and



Figure 11. South Vietnam crop destruction missions, January to December 1967. (Figure classified Confidential.)

dimensions of the defoliation and crop destruction programs are simply described.

(U) The main source of data was a computer file that contained a record of every spray mission flown in South Vietnam. This was used to make the computer plots displayed in following pages and to develop the statistical findings set forth below. Analysis of data on herbicide operations in South Vietnam through 1970 showed that:

- (U) Herbicides could not have caused widespread devastation throughout all of South Vietnam, because from 1962 to 1970, herbicide was sprayed on less than 10 percent of its land area.
- (U) In 1967, the year of greatest herbicide use, less than 3 percent of the country was



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defoliated; about 2.4 percent of the land under cultivation was subject to crop destruction.

- (U) The Hamlet Evaluation System (see Chapter XIII) indicated that about 3 percent of the population lived in defoliated areas; less than 1 percent lived where crops were destroyed.

(U) Herbicide operations were conducted under rigid controls involving both U.S. and GVN authorities at all levels. Crop destruction was confined to the lightly populated rice deficit highlands of Military Regions 1 and 2; at no time were crops destroyed in the country's food producing center (Military Region 4). After 1967, the primary crop destruction targets were plots of mountain rice and vegetables in areas considered hostile. Most (about 90 percent) of all crop destruction was confined to areas in and around known VC/NVA base areas.

(U) The map in Fig. 8 shows where the herbicide missions were flown in relation to populated

areas of South Vietnam. As can be seen, large-scale defoliation (Figs. 8 and 9) was used in attempts to hamper Communist forces in:

- The DMZ and mountains of Military Region 1.
- Western Kontum and Pleiku.
- War zones C and D in Military Region 3.
- Mangrove swamps in the Rung Sat Special Zone, the U Minh Forest, the Ca Mau Peninsula, and the coasts of Vinh Binh and Kien Hoa provinces. Many of these areas (Military Region 1, Kontum, Tay Ninh War Zone C, and Kien Hoa) were introduced to the reader in Chapter II as being areas where most of the fighting occurred, in the French Indochina War as well as in the U.S.-RVNAF War 20 years later.

(U) Figures 10 and 11 show the areas where crop destruction missions were flown from 1965 to 1970 (Fig. 10) and during 1967 (Fig. 11).



## Chapter IX

### Stalemate

(U) The dominant U.S./GVN strategic thrust from mid-1965 through at least 1969 was to destroy the Communist-organized military forces by grinding them down. As Gen. William Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam for much of the period, has said: "It was, in essence, a war of attrition."<sup>(87)</sup> He also stated what became the more or less standard formulation of the attrition objective: "Attrit, by year's end, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces at a rate as high as their capability to put men into the field."<sup>(87)</sup> This was always stated as one of several goals, but at least until late 1969 it was always considered the most important one.

(U) But after several years, the war was acknowledged to be a military stalemate.\* Why was this? Why did the attrition strategy fail? After all, on the face of it, the Allies had all the military advantages. They outnumbered the VC/NVA forces by as much as 6 to 1, and they had far superior mobility, firepower, and combat support. Yet the Allied forces could not destroy the VC/NVA forces, despite their attrition strategy. Quite the contrary, the estimated VC/NVA force level at the end of 1972 was higher than in 1965 (see Chapter IV). The forces were weaker, but intact.

(U) *It was becoming apparent as early as late 1966 that the U.S. military strategy of attrition was in*

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\*According to press reports, if returning American prisoners of war asked who won the war, their escort officers were to answer: "North Vietnam didn't win. South Vietnam didn't lose." Also see: "U.S. Officials See a Vietnam Stalemate," *New York Times*, May 7, 1974, p. 3.

*trouble.* The objective of attriting the VC/NVA forces at a rate equal to or greater than their ability to infiltrate and recruit new troops was not being achieved. This theme is evident in Secretary McNamara's statements of November 17, 1966 in his draft memorandum for the President:

. . . if MACV estimates of enemy strength are correct, we have not been able to attrit the enemy forces fast enough to break down their morale and more U.S. forces are unlikely to do so for the foreseeable future . . .<sup>(88)</sup>

. . . the data suggest that we have no prospects of attriting the enemy force at a rate equal to or greater than his capability to infiltrate and recruit, and this will be true at either the 470,000 U.S. personnel level or 570,000.<sup>(89)</sup>

If we assume that the estimates of enemy strength are accurate, the ratio of total friendly to total enemy strength has only increased from 3.5 to 4.0 to 1 since the end of 1965. Under the circumstances, it does not appear that we have the favorable leverage required to achieve decisive attrition by introducing more forces.<sup>(90)</sup>

(U) The Communist forces survived because North Vietnam had enough manpower and the will to rebuild the VC/NVA units after each offensive. Furthermore, the VC/NVA was able to control its casualty rates to a great extent by controlling the number, size, and intensity of combat engagements, and it could therefore limit its losses to what it could afford.

(U) By the middle of 1967, it was clear that the availability of the North Vietnamese manpower



pool and the willingness to send it south would prevent the Allies from winning the war of attrition. After more than two years of American troop involvement, the number of NVA troops in South Vietnam was less than 2 percent of the North Vietnamese male labor force and less than 3 percent of the male agricultural force. By comparison, the U.S. forces in Southeast Asia at that time amounted to about 1 percent of our male civilian labor force.<sup>(91)</sup>

(U) After the 1968 Tet offensive, statistical analysis again suggested that manpower reserves in North Vietnam were sufficient to meet 1968 requirements and that they could even support a higher level of mobilization without significant shortages, although there would probably be some strains in the labor force. The analysis also noted that if North Vietnam mobilized the same percentage of its population as South Vietnam, its full-time military force would double in size.<sup>(92)</sup>

(U) Another set of calculations after the 1968 offensives suggested that, at first half 1968 loss rates (the highest of the war), available North Vietnamese manpower would be exhausted in about 30 years and Viet Cong manpower in 3½ years. The Viet Cong and NVA together appeared able to last about 12 years.<sup>(93)</sup> The analysis was crude, but it does give some idea of the VC/NVA's potential staying power in the face of loss rates so high that they never occurred again. It also suggests that the Viet Cong forces *could* be attrited. Indeed, by the end of 1972 most of them were gone; only 20 percent of the VC/NVA forces were estimated to be Viet Cong. The rest were North Vietnamese troops, even in traditional Viet Cong units (see Chapter IV).

(U) The foregoing statements were all very rough estimates, based on the best data available in 1967–68. But they have turned out to be about right. They accurately foreshadowed the Allied inability to win the war of attrition.

(U) A second major reason the VC/NVA forces were able to survive the Allied strategy of attrition was that *they were able to exercise considerable control over their loss rates and thus keep those losses from going beyond the limits they could afford*. They did this by deciding when and where large-scale combat would occur—they held the initiative in this respect.

(U) The vastly superior forces of the Allies found it difficult, despite repeated offensives, to pin down and defeat an enemy who chose to evade combat. A key aspect of the VC/NVA's ability to avoid combat was its use of sanctuaries in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which remained off limits to U.S./GVN ground forces for political reasons until 1970–71.

(U) The following analysis assumes that the ability to control casualty rates is one way to measure military initiative in South Vietnam. To win the war of attrition, the Allies must hold the military initiative. Specifically, the tempo of Allied offensive operations must control the tempo of Communist combat deaths; if Allied operations increase, VC/NVA deaths must rise accordingly, whether they want them to or not.

(U) *A statistical analysis after the 1968 offensives indicated that the VC/NVA had much more influence over fluctuations in both its combat deaths and U.S. combat deaths than did the Allied forces.*<sup>(94)</sup> It concluded that the VC/NVA held the basic military initiative in South Vietnam because it could alter the combat death levels by changing the frequency and intensity of its attacks.\* Changing the tempo of Allied operations had little effect.

(U) The very strong relationship between VC/NVA attacks and U.S. combat deaths was interpreted to mean that if the VC/NVA desired to increase U.S. casualties, at the cost of increasing its own, then it could simply step up its offensive operations and its willingness to fight U.S. forces whenever the opportunity arose. The lack of a similar relationship between casualties and any of the Allied activity indicators was interpreted as a lack of casualty control by U.S. forces, as long as they persisted in a policy of maximum pressure on the VC/NVA main forces at all times.

(U) A later study used the same statistical correlation technique to see whether the earlier relationship continued to hold after the Tet offensive in 1968.<sup>(95)</sup> When the period after Tet 1968† was compared with the previous period,‡ the rela-

\*Attacks include all VC/NVA attacks (large, small, and by fire) and they are used here as an indicator of the level of the VC/NVA willingness to fight and to take casualties.

†July 1968–November 1969.

‡January 1966–June 1968.



TABLE 44. Correlation analysis: VC/NVA attacks against combat deaths; all figures are in  $R^2$ . (Table unclassified.)

VC/NVA Attacks	Combat Deaths		
	VC/NVA	U.S.	RVNAF
Pre-1968 Offensives <sup>a/</sup>	.55 <u>8/</u>	.63	.10
Through 1968 Offensives <sup>b/</sup>	.84	.87	.68
Post-1968 Offensives <sup>c/</sup>	.77	.22	.28

Source: "Military Initiative in South Vietnam: A Follow-Up", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, January 1970, p. 36.

- a/ July 1965 through December 1967.
- b/ January 1966 through June 1968.
- c/ July 1968 through November 1969.

tionships between VC/NVA attacks and Allied combat deaths *declined* substantially. The correlations between U.S. battalion and larger operations with contact and combat deaths *increased* as dramatically. This was taken as a sign that the military initiative in terms of control over U.S. combat deaths had been shifting to the United States after June 1968, as it shifted away from an aggressive, maximum-pressure strategy. However, the VC/NVA ability to control fluctuations in its own deaths remained high.

(U) Table 44 shows the relationships between combat deaths in South Vietnam and VC/NVA attacks. The correlations between VC/NVA attacks and *its own combat deaths* did not change much after the 1968 offensives. This suggests that there was little change in the VC/NVA's ability to alter its level of combat deaths by changing its level of attacks. Before 1968, it could presumably control about 85 percent of the fluctuations; after June 1968, it seemed to have some control over about 75 percent of the changes,\* enough to frustrate the Allied attrition strategy.

(U) Table 44 also suggests that the correlation between VC/NVA attacks and U.S. combat deaths changed significantly in the Allies' favor after the Tet offensive. Before and during the offensive the VC/NVA seemed to control about 85 percent of

\*All percentages are based on the  $R^2$  coefficients derived from statistical correlation analysis. The  $R^2$  indicates the degree of relationship between the variables, that is, the proportion of total variation in one variable explained by the other. An  $R^2$  of 0.50 indicates that 50 percent of the variation in one variable can be explained by variation in the other. In this case, the  $R^2$  are 0.84 and 0.77, respectively.

TABLE 45. Correlation analysis: friendly battalion operations with contact against combat deaths; figures in  $R^2$ .<sup>(95)</sup> (Table unclassified.)

Allied Operations	VC/NVA KIA	U.S. KIA	RVNAF KIA
Pre-1968 Offensives <sup>a/</sup>	.05	.02	NA
Through-1968 Offensives <sup>b/</sup>	.07	.10	NA
Post-1968 Offensives <sup>c/</sup>	.66	.63	.19

- a/ July 1965 through December 1967.
- b/ January 1966 through June 1968.
- c/ July 1968 through November 1969.

the fluctuations in U.S. combat deaths by changing its level of attacks and willingness to fight. Afterwards it could control only about 20 percent of the variation in U.S. combat deaths.\*\* Moreover, the pre-1968 figure of 63 percent indicates that the relationship did not simply drop back to pre-Tet days; a real change appears to have taken place. The VC/NVA also could no longer significantly increase U.S. casualties by simply increasing its attacks. Similarly, the RVNAF figure dropped after June 1968, but it remained higher than before Tet 1968 (0.28 versus 0.10).

(U) In short, the VC/NVA no longer exerted the control over U.S. combat deaths that it did before, although it still retained considerable control over its own combat deaths. Put another way, the VC/NVA still lost large numbers of troops only when it was willing to, but it could no longer increase U.S. and Allied combat deaths easily when it wanted to.

(U) The following conclusions emerge from the analysis. *Up to and through the 1968 offensives, the VC/NVA maintained a fair degree of control over fluctuations in its own combat deaths and those of the Allies, particularly of U.S. forces.* By increasing its willingness to take casualties (signified by a rising attack rate), the VC/NVA could increase Allied casualties, or by reducing the attack rate it could limit its own combat deaths. The Allies, on the other hand, appeared to have little control over changes in their own combat deaths or those of the VC/NVA (see Table 45). This is interpreted to mean that the VC/NVA held the military initiative in South Vietnam through June 1968, at least in terms of casualties.

(U) Assistant Secretary of Defense Alain Enthoven summed up the problem on March 20,

\*\*The  $R^2$  were 0.87 and 0.22, respectively.



1968 in his first memorandum about Vietnam to the new Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford:

One important fact about the war in Vietnam is that the enemy can control his casualty rate, at least to a great extent, by controlling the number, size, and intensity of combat engagements. If he so chooses, he can limit his casualties to a rate that he is able to bear indefinitely. Therefore, the notion that we can "win" this war by driving the VC/NVA from the country or by inflicting an unacceptable rate of casualties on them is false. Moreover, a 40 percent increase in friendly forces cannot be counted upon to produce a 40 percent increase in enemy casualties if the enemy doesn't want that to happen.<sup>(96)</sup>

(U) *However, after the Tet offensives in 1968, the initiative shifted somewhat. The U.S. forces gained considerable control over both their own combat deaths and those of the Communists, although the latter's ability to retain control over fluctuations in their own deaths remained high, as shown in Table 45.*

(U) The results seem to say that major fluctuations in VC/NVA losses were still fundamentally determined by its willingness to fight, but that the U.S. forces learned how to step up their operations and fight much more efficiently when the VC/NVA stepped up its attacks.

(U) A second reason why the initiative may have shifted toward the Allies is that losses of trained VC/NVA cadre and personnel, particularly during the 1968 offensives, apparently lowered the fighting effectiveness of the Communist forces in South Vietnam. The results of the accelerated pacification campaign in the second half of 1968 and the further gains made without stiff opposition until 1972 both testify to the serious beating the VC/NVA cadre and units took during the Tet offensive. Largely because of these losses, Hanoi apparently elected to conserve and rebuild its forces during 1969-71, while awaiting U.S. withdrawal.

(U) But even the shift in initiative was not enough for the Allies to drive the VC/NVA forces from the field and win a clear-cut victory. The VC/NVA military forces were weakened significantly in the years following 1968, but they remained strong enough to launch a major offensive in 1972 and were still active late in 1974.

(U) How did they do it?<sup>(97, 98)</sup> In terms of total

TABLE 46. *The Allies always outnumbered the VC/NVA by at least 3.5 to 1. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	<u>Manpower (000)</u> <u>End of Year</u>	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
(C)	ALLIES <sup>a/</sup>	807	1096	1226	1463	1549	1450	1258	1150
(C)	VC/NVA <sup>b/</sup>	226	290	262	315	265	245	220	276
(U)	ALLIED/VC/NVA Force Ratio	3.6	3.8	4.7	4.6	5.8	5.9	5.7	4.2

Sources: Tables 11, 13, and 14 in Chapter IV.

<sup>a/</sup> Includes CIDG forces.

<sup>b/</sup> Mid points of VC/NVA range estimates from Chapter IV are used here.

military manpower, the Allies always outnumbered the VC/NVA forces by at least three to one, and the ratio approached six to one during 1969-71 (see Table 46). *But the cutting edges of fighting forces are the troops in maneuver battalions, and Allied superiority falls away sharply on this basis, because the Allied foxhole strength, and particularly the U.S. foxhole strength, was much lower than the public realized.* Instead of outnumbering VC/NVA forces by almost 6 to 1 in 1970, the advantage falls to 1.6. Moreover, the ratio remains fairly steady during the 1965-71 period, instead of rising as the total manpower ratio does. And it actually shifts to an Allied *disadvantage* of 0.8 to 1 in 1972 (see Table 47). The comparison is revealing, because the maneuver forces are the principal ones available to each side for combat and their size imposes a limit to offensive activities.\*

(U) Furthermore, the commitment of some of these forces to defensive missions further reduced Allied offensive capabilities. For instance, the Allies had large and continuing needs for combat forces to secure military bases, lines of communication (roads, canals, etc.), and populated areas. An analysis of force allocations in January 1968 suggested that only 40 percent of the Allied maneuver forces were available for offensive operations during that month.

(U) Of course, Allied offensive forces could be

\*This force comparison would be misleading if a large portion of the Allied or VC/NVA enemy offensive forces were committed against forces—GVN paramilitary or VC guerrillas—not included in the comparison. Evidence from 1967 indicates about 60 to 70 percent of Allied main-force activity was probably directed against VC/NVA main-force units, and vice versa. For instance, during 1967, 67 percent of the VC/NVA incidents against Allied forces were against U.S./FW/ARVN main forces and only 33 percent against the territorial forces.<sup>(99)</sup>



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TABLE 47. *The Allied advantage declined sharply when the comparison is limited to combat manpower. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Manpower (000) End of Year		1967 (U)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
(U)	ALLIES <sup>a/</sup>	218	240	223	188	145	119
(C)	VC/NVA	132	160	130	120	105	152
(U)	ALLIED/VC/NVA Force Ratio	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.4	.8

<sup>a/</sup> Strengths were calculated by assuming 550 men per RVNAF battalion, and 1,000 men per U.S./3rd Nation battalion for the Maneuver Battalions shown in Table 100, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), January 24, 1973.  
Total regular combat force figures from Table 11 of Chapter IV.  
Mid point of range estimates is used here.

increased by shifting units from security missions back into offensive operations, and this happened, especially during VC/NVA offensives, but there was always a risk of leaving the population unprotected. The RVNAF's ability to shift forces to where they were needed was always severely limited until late in the war, when the territorial forces had become numerous enough and strong

enough to take over most of the security missions (as shown in Chapter XIV).

(U) The VC/NVA's strategic situation was quite different. It didn't have to use many of its regular forces for defensive missions. It had no cities to defend, and its base areas and lines of communication were not held and defended by large numbers of troops. It also had the advantage of sanctuaries up to 1970-71. Most of the VC/NVA regular forces were free to engage Allied forces as they saw fit, as long as they didn't incur heavy losses too frequently.

(U) Given the commitment of regular forces to security missions for much of the war, the remaining Allied forces held no significant advantage over the VC/NVA forces that could potentially be committed against them. The force ratio in this situation ranged from an Allied advantage of 1.2 to 1 to an Allied *disadvantage* of 0.7 to 1. Stated another way, the VC/NVA potential sometimes outnumbered the Allied maneuver forces by 1.4 to 1, measured on this basis (see Table 48).

TABLE 48. *The VC/NVA outnumbered the Allies half the time in terms of combat troops available for offensive operations. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Manpower (000)		1967 (U)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
(C)	ALLIES <sup>a/</sup>	111 <sup>b/</sup>	184	162	131	81	101
(C)	VC/NVA	132 <sup>b/</sup>	160	130	120	105	152
(U)	ALLIED/Enemy Force Ratio	.8	1.2	1.2	1.1	.8	.7

<sup>a/</sup> The allied regular force manpower engaged in offensive combat operations was calculated by arriving at the average number of allied battalions engaged in combat operations each day in the month of January for the years 1968 through 1973, and then assuming 550-man RVNAF battalions and 1000-man U.S. - 3rd Nation battalions. The number of allied maneuver battalions on combat operations is available for each day in the "Ground Operations Daily Summary" in the National Military Command Center Operations Summary.

Source: Total Regular Combat Force figures from Table 11 of Chapter IV.  
Mid points of range estimates are used here.

<sup>b/</sup> Allied figures are for January following the year shown, i.e., 1967 figure is actually Jan. 1968 data. VC/NVA figures are end of year shown.



TABLE 49. *Growth of the Regional and Popular Forces improved the Allied position after the U.S. troops withdrew. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Manpower in Ground Combat Maneuver Units (Year end - 000)		1967 (U)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
ALLIES							
(C)	All Regular Forces <sup>a/</sup>	218	240	223	188	145	119
(C)	VN Regional Forces <sup>b/</sup>	98	143	170	184	185	196
(C)	VN Popular Forces <sup>b/</sup>	134	155	193	226	223	197
	CIDG <sup>c/</sup>	38	42	35	-	-	-
	Total (C)	488	580	621	598	553	512
VC/NVA <sup>c/</sup>							
(C)	Regular	132	160	130	120	105	152
(C)	Guerrillas	81	65	45	35	30	30
(C)	Total	213	225	175	155	135	182
(U)	ALLIED/ENEMY Force Ratio	2.3	2.6	3.5	3.9	4.1	2.8

<sup>a/</sup> Includes RVNAF, U.S. and 3rd National Regular Forces.

<sup>b/</sup> Regional Forces (RF) combat manpower calculated as 65 percent of RF total strength, and Popular Forces (PF) as 90 percent of PF total.

See "RF/PF Effectiveness", *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*, August 1969, p. 13.

<sup>c/</sup> Source: Table 11 of Chapter IV.

(U) The two sets of combat force ratios in Tables 47 and 48 are not precise—far from it. They are based on the best data available, some of which are rough estimates. However, the findings deserve serious consideration, because *even if the ratios are wrong by 50 percent, they still say that the foxhole force ratio did not favor the Allies nearly as much as the total manpower figures suggest.* The data may be rough, but the findings seem roughly right,\* and they do help explain why the Allies were unable to win the war of attrition.

(U) The comparisons do not tell the whole story, because the Allies enjoyed overwhelming superiority (or so it seemed) in firepower (particularly air and artillery), logistics support, and rapid movement of troops. However, there is evidence that the VC/NVA was able to fight in a way that nullified many of the Allied advantages.

(U) One such way was for the VC/NVA to mass its forces to exploit favorable opportunities while tying down Allied forces by using small forces† to attack and harass outposts, roads, waterways, and the population. In this way the VC/NVA

tying down some of the Allied forces in order to gain an edge against others. Such a strategy, combined with the use of night operations and thousands of standoff attacks by fire, went a long way toward neutralizing Allied advantages. The cost in VC/NVA lives was high, but controllable, and the Allies were not able to turn their decisive resource superiority into a decisive military advantage.

(U) By the end of 1968, the futility of the attrition strategy had become evident to all, as expressed in the summary of responses to National Security Study Memorandum 1—the Situation in Vietnam:

There is general agreement with the JCS statement, "The enemy, by the type action he adopts, has the predominant share in determining enemy attrition rates." Three-fourths of the battles are at the enemy's choice of time, place, type, and duration. CIA notes that less than one percent of nearly 2 million Allied small-unit operations conducted in the last two years resulted in contact with the enemy and, when ARVN is surveyed, the percentage drops to one-tenth of one percent. With his safe havens in Laos and Cambodia and with carefully chosen tactics, the enemy has been able during the last four years to double his combat forces, double the level of infiltration, and increase the scale and intensity of the main-force war, even while bearing heavy casualties.<sup>(99)</sup>

Finally, late in the summer of 1969, the attrition strategy ceased to be the prime objective stated by MACV. It was superseded by Vietnamization,

\*For criticism of the approach, see Ref. 100.

†As already noted in Chapter V, more than 90 percent of all reported VC/NVA ground assaults were by units estimated to be smaller than a battalion—even during the peak combat years of 1968 and 1972.



which reflected the U.S. decision to gradually disengage from the war.

(U) If the attrition strategy failed, why did the VC/NVA agree to a cease fire? Why not wait until U.S. forces finally departed and then attack? The answer is not clear, but yet another set of force ratios may provide a clue. So far, the discussion has considered only total manpower and the cutting edge of combat manpower, the regular force maneuver battalions. The Viet Cong guerrillas and the South Vietnamese territorial forces have been neglected. Adding the combat manpower represented by these forces yields the result shown in Table 49.

(U) The ratios shown in the table do not favor the Allies as much as those for total manpower in Table 46, *but the trend is better*. The force ratio rose every year until 1972 and portrays an increasingly favorable balance of combat forces, even as U.S. troops withdrew. The change in 1972 stems from the large buildup of VC/NVA regular forces in Military Region 1 for the 1972 offensive.

(U) The key change is the growth of the Vietnamese territorial forces, who grew not only in numbers, but in improved equipment and other factors that increased their effectiveness. Their growth enabled them to take over security duties from the regular units and to free most of them for offensive combat; even as U.S. battalions left the country.\*

(U) The effects on Allied manpower available for combat and for security missions are fairly clear from an analysis of Tables 48 and 49. Allied

\*See Chapter XIV for details of the shift.

regular troops on offensive combat operations declined from 184,000 in 1968 to 101,000 in 1972, a reduction of 83,000. But 127,000 U.S. and third-nation troops withdrew from offensive operations during the same period. Thus, the gain of 95,000 Regional and Popular Forces troops released 44,000 RVNAF regular troops to go into offensive combat against VC/NVA forces.† An additional benefit was that 95,000 RF/PF troops, mostly in companies and platoons, could protect more population than could 44,000 regular troops concentrated in battalions. Finally, and best of all for the Allies, *the new posture depended solely on South Vietnamese troops*, not Americans or third nations. Moreover, the Communists faced the prospect that the Allied posture might get better as time passed.

(U) The patterns, while not conclusive, do suggest that trends unfavorable to the VC/NVA were under way and likely to continue, even without the presence of U.S. ground and air forces. This may have been a factor in the VC/NVA's decision to settle for the cease fire. Moreover, it must be pointed out that while the Allies couldn't defeat the VC/NVA by attacking it (because the Communists could control their own casualties), its heavy losses when it tried to win by all-out offensives in 1968 and 1972 twice forced it to retreat to a protracted war strategy and, particularly in 1972, to negotiate. Thus, both sides faced a stalemate from 1967 on.‡

†127,000 minus 83,000 equals 44,000.

‡Lest the writer be accused of arguing from the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, the reader should note that most of the analyses and statements cited in this chapter were written prior to the end of 1968. The first challenge to the attrition strategy came in May 1967 with the publication of "The Strategy of Attrition" in the *Southeast Asia Analysis Report* of May 1967, pages 13-15.

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PART THREE  
THE CASUALTY TOLL

UNCLASSIFIED







# Chapter X

## The Military Casualties

(U) Casualties are the tragic by-product of any war, and they loomed large in controversies about the Vietnam War in the United States and elsewhere. This chapter discusses casualty rates on both sides, presenting the statistics available and analyzing the trends and patterns they show. Unfortunately, the statistical style seems cold-blooded, because figures by themselves can never give the reader any real feeling for the suffering, death, maiming, and tragedy they represent, although the enormity of some of the figures may have impact. But some knowledge of casualty levels, trends, and locations is necessary to understand a war without fronts, so the data, gruesome as they are, must be analyzed.

(U) The approach centers on combat deaths—the KIA (killed in action)—because (1) prisoners, although they had a large political impact, were a small portion of the casualties, and (2) every Allied force in Vietnam counted its wounded differently, so those figures are not comparable among forces. Also, no data are available for Communist wounded. For comparative analysis, then, the combat death figures (KIA) are the best measurement.

### VC/NVA COMBAT DEATHS

#### ACCURACY PROBLEM

(U) It is doubtful whether or not anybody, including Hanoi, really knows how many VC/NVA troops died. As with the figures on VC/NVA forces (Chapter IV), there are great uncertainties

in the KIA estimates. This should be no surprise, in view of the obvious difficulties of counting VC/NVA casualties. This problem is not unique to the Vietnam War, but the Allied attrition strategy generated so much emphasis on the “body count” that the figures received far more attention than they deserved. Indeed, they cast a “killer” pall over the entire Allied effort in Vietnam.

(U) Allied forces simply could not count VC/NVA casualties accurately while the war was being fought, because it was too difficult and dangerous. Many problems existed. Early in the war, the VC/NVA placed a high priority on reclaiming its dead from the battlefield, so most of them were not left to be counted. The terrain in much of Vietnam made it difficult to find all of the VC/NVA dead, particularly in the jungles and swamps. If several Allied units were involved in the same action, with each doing its own body count, double counting was possible, even likely. Continuing combat or sniper fire sometimes made it too dangerous to do more than estimate VC/NVA losses (and it is a safe conjecture that headquarters was demanding a “body count” from the unit commander). Some of the VC/NVA forces were killed by artillery, tactical air, and B-52 strikes in areas where the dead could not be counted. Finally, if the body count made the outcome look bad for the Allied unit, the temptation to produce an exaggerated estimate was strong.



TABLE 50. *The balance-sheet approach showed a discrepancy of 110,000 between VC/NVA force changes and VC/NVA deaths. (Table unclassified.)*

(In Thousands)		1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Cumulative Total
1.	Personnel Inputs <sup>a/</sup>	116	172	143	305	156	115	119	158	1,284
2.	Personnel Losses <sup>b/</sup>	59	92	141	262	244	161	147	192	1,298
3.	Inputs Minus Losses	57	80	2	43	-88	-46	-28	-34	-14
4.	VC/NVA Force Level Changes <sup>c/</sup>	46	64	-28	53	-50	-20	-25	55	+95

<sup>a/</sup> Inputs include estimates of recruitment and infiltration.

<sup>b/</sup> Losses include combat deaths, deaths from wounds (based on intelligence community factor of .35 times KIA), Prisoners, and military defectors.

<sup>c/</sup> Based on Table 11 in Chapter IV.

(U) Other difficulties exist, but these illustrate the problem. They also indicate why it was not possible to count Viet Cong and North Vietnamese dead separately, despite pressure from higher headquarters to do so. Again, the attrition strategy generated the pressure, with its concern about trends in the NVA force structure.

(U) Considerable effort was made to check the validity of the VC/NVA loss estimates, but the results were not conclusive. One type of analysis tried to extrapolate the losses reported in captured VC/NVA documents. Another used a balance-sheet approach, which subtracted VC/NVA losses from VC/NVA inputs (recruitment and infiltration) and then compared the answer with the changes in estimated VC/NVA force levels.

(U) At least four attempts were made to extrapolate total VC/NVA losses from a sample of captured VC/NVA documents. The first was a MACV study of 70 documents that produced an estimate that VC/NVA KIA in 1966 were probably 4.5 percent *above* the official body count.<sup>(1)</sup> In the second effort, analysts in Washington refined the analysis, used the same 70 documents, and estimated that VC/NVA KIA in 1966 were probably 20 percent *below* the official figures.<sup>(1)\*</sup> The third analysis examined 84 documents in Washington and concluded that total VC/NVA KIA for 1965 through 1968 were probably 30 percent lower than the official estimates, but that total losses were probably higher than the official figures, if

VC/NVA losses to disease were taken into account.<sup>(2)</sup> The fourth, based on 136 documents and further refinements in the method of analysis, concluded that both VC/NVA KIA and its total losses probably amounted to about *half* of the official estimates.<sup>(2)</sup> (At least one seasoned operations analyst, with experience in World War II and Korea, cuts counts of "enemy" KIA by 50 percent as a rule of thumb.) The attempts ceased at this point. Meanwhile, in a famous interview with Oriana Fallaci in 1968, General Giap reportedly acknowledged the loss of about 500,000 men in the war, which is more than the official KIA count of 435,000 at the end of 1968. It is unlikely that the actual figures will ever be known.

(U) Table 50 shows the balance-sheet approach to estimating VC/NVA casualties. Losses were subtracted from estimated VC/NVA inputs, and the result was compared with changes in VC/NVA force levels, which were estimated separately in the order-of-battle process. The table shows inputs and losses roughly in balance for the eight-year period as a whole, but VC/NVA forces increased by 95,000. The result is a discrepancy of about 110,000 in the balance, which averages out to about 14,000 per year. In all but two years (1967 and 1972), the actual figures moved in the same direction, although some yearly discrepancies were fairly large. All factors considered, the balance isn't too bad, and it suggests that the various estimates of forces, losses, and inputs have some coherence, although each was estimated by different people with different tools and techniques.

\*References for Part Three begin on page 867.



(U) But the balance is probably helped by two factors: The intelligence community periodically assessed some losses against the estimated VC/NVA force levels, and MACV actually used the balance-sheet approach to help estimate VC/NVA force levels for a while. However, the yearly differences between lines 3 and 4 in the table are large enough to indicate that these two efforts were not undertaken with the aim of producing a precise balance. An anonymous analyst has the final word on the balance-sheet approach:

Estimating the enemy's manpower balance is beset with innumerable pitfalls, because of the several quantitative series that must be constructed on the basis of soft and erratic data . . . the margin of error in such estimates is such that they are adequate to judge general trends and capabilities, but we would issue a strong caveat against expecting any estimate to yield even a close balancing of gross manpower inputs and attrition.

(U) Despite the uncertainties in the VC/NVA combat death estimates, the figures are worth analyzing because they shed some light on the VC/NVA's persistence and approach to the war. But such analysis must be confined to general trends and patterns. The figures are not accurate enough for more than this.

VC/NVA COMBAT DEATH LEVELS AND TRENDS

(U) Table 51 displays the official U.S. statistics of VC/NVA combat deaths in the Vietnam War. These are the best data available, and they are a product of intensive efforts to produce reasonably good estimates; but the uncertainties are great.\* The table says that the VC/NVA may have lost as many as 850,000 dead during 1965-72, an average of more than 100,000 combat deaths each year. The trend rose each year to a peak of 180,000 during 1968, then fell off to about 100,000 per year by 1970-71. Then the VC/NVA offensive in 1972 boosted the toll again.

(U) Data for 1967 through 1972 showing VC/NVA combat deaths by military region in South Vietnam indicate that 35 percent of the deaths occurred in Military Region 1, which fits the pattern of intense combat already shown there. Military Regions 3 and 4 each accounted for 20 percent, and Military Region 2 was in last place

\*Other KIA estimates can be found, but they are all considered less accurate than the figures shown here.

TABLE 51. *An estimated 850,000 VC/NVA died in South Vietnam; figures in thousands. (Table unclassified.)*

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total
VC/NVA Deaths From Hostile Action (U)	35	56	88	181	157	104	98	132	851

Source: Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), August 9, 1972 - April 11, 1973, pp. 1-9.

Data for 1970 includes VC/NVA combat deaths from the U.S.-RVNAF operations in Cambodia. Data for 1971 and 1972 includes VC/NVA combat deaths from operations in both Laos and Cambodia.

with 17 percent. Operations in Cambodia and the panhandle of Laos during 1970 and 1971 accounted for about 5 percent.

(U) When the combat deaths in Table 51 are compared with the reported sizes of the VC/NVA forces,† they were high indeed. The estimated force size averaged 245,000 for the period, and VC/NVA combat deaths reportedly averaged 106,000 per year. *This suggests that more than 40 percent of the VC/NVA force were killed in action every year.* The figure for 1968, the year of the Tet offensive, was more than 60 percent. Rough as these percentages are, given the uncertainties of the data, they do suggest that the VC/NVA took extremely heavy casualties.

(U) The rule of thumb for western armies is that a military unit ceases to function in combat at the point when 30 percent of its troops have been killed or wounded. According to the estimates, the VC/NVA exceeded this percentage every year after 1966 and still managed to keep the war going. The cohesion of its units, its infrequent commitment to combat (perhaps once every six months), and its careful rebuilding after each campaign all help to explain the VC/NVA's ability to persist in the face of very high losses.

ALLIED COMBAT DEATHS

(U) Turning to Allied combat deaths, we find that some of the concerns about accuracy and reliability of the figures can be discarded. United States combat deaths were the most accurate statistics

†Midpoint strength estimates taken from Table 13 of Chapter IV.



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TABLE 52. *Some 222,000 Allied troops died in combat. (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>Total</u>
(U) RVNAF <sup>a,b/</sup>	11,243	11,953	12,716	27,915	21,833	23,346	22,738	39,587	171,331
(U) U.S. <sup>a/</sup>	1,369	5,008	9,378	14,592	9,414	4,221	1,380	300	45,662
(U) Third Nation	31	566	1,105	979	866	704	526	443	5,221
(U) Total	12,643	17,527	23,199	43,486	32,113	28,271	24,644	40,330	222,214

Source: Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), April 11, 1973, pp. 1-9.

a/ Includes combat deaths in Laos and Cambodia.

b/ Includes RVNAF and Paramilitary combat deaths.

from the Vietnam War. Enormous effort goes into U.S. casualty reporting in any war, with a name, rank, and serial number standing behind every figure added to the toll—witness the U.S. effort in every war to find out what happened to the missing. The Vietnamese casualty data are much less reliable than those for U.S. casualties. The detailed statistics show considerable turbulence in

the reporting system. Still, they are good enough for the limited analysis done here. The accuracy of the third-nation casualty data probably lies somewhere between the U.S. and Vietnamese data, but that is purely a guess.

(U) Table 52 shows that about 222,000 Allied troops were killed in South Vietnam during the

TABLE 53. *Some 170,000 South Vietnamese troops were killed in combat. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>RVNAF:</u>	<u>(U)</u>	<u>(U)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>(C)</u>	<u>      </u>
(C) Regular Forces	5044	4418	6110	12930	8652	9647	8864	19735 <sup>a/</sup>	75,360
(C) RF/PF	<u>6239</u>	<u>7535</u>	<u>6606</u>	<u>11393</u>	<u>10286</u>	<u>11738</u>	<u>13118</u>	<u>18962<sup>a/</sup></u>	<u>85,877</u>
(C) Total Military	11243	11953	12716	24323	18938	21385	21982	38697	161,237
(C) Paramilitary	n/a	n/a	n/a	3592	2895	1961	756	890	10,094
(U) Total	11243	11953	12716	27915	21833	23346	22738	39587	171,331

Sources: Based on calculations and assumptions using Tables 2 and 53, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Table 2, April 11, 1973, pp. 1-8; Table 53, February 16, 1972, pp. 1-5.

a/ Official figures showing Regular and RF/PF deaths separately are not available for 1972. These estimates are based on a sample of OPREP-5 messages which indicate that 49 percent of the 1972 deaths were RF/PF and 51 percent were Regular. These factors were applied against the total of 38,697 to develop the figures officially shown.



eight years of 1965-72, an average of 28,000 per year. The South Vietnamese accounted for 77 percent of the total. The U.S. share of losses was 21 percent and the third-nation forces lost about 2 percent.

(U) As seen in Chapter II, the toll grew each year to a peak in 1968 and then declined to the 1967 level by 1971. *The offensive in 1972 raised Allied combat deaths to the 1968 level, only this time the South Vietnamese took virtually all (98 percent) of the losses.*

(U) The reduction in Allied KIA rates from 1968 through 1971 was caused by a reduction in combat, starting in 1969 (after the 1968 peak), and by the withdrawal of U.S. troops from mid-1969 on. Note that South Vietnamese combat deaths were about the same in 1969, 1970, and 1971, while U.S. deaths declined sharply, accounting for most of the reductions in the totals.

(U) Chapter II shows that Allied combat deaths were not evenly distributed throughout South Vietnam, but were heavily concentrated in five provinces. They accounted for 11 percent of the provinces, but for 33 percent of the Allied combat deaths. The pattern is similar to that for VC/NVA combat deaths, in that the largest share (35 percent) occurred in the five provinces of Military Region 1.

SOUTH VIETNAMESE COMBAT DEATHS

(U) Problems of reliability and consistency plagued the tabulation and analysis of South Vietnamese casualty data, and they provide a dramatic illustration of the critical importance of, and need for, good reporting. During one sustained period of the war, U.S. combat deaths always appeared to be higher than RVNAF deaths. This led one Secretary of Defense to believe that the Vietnamese weren't carrying their share of the load, and he criticized them harshly. Investigation of the RVNAF reports eventually showed that the Vietnamese statistics being sent to Washington were preliminary field reports. The combat death totals in them were about 40 to 50 percent below the final, verified reports. After these data were furnished, *Vietnamese deaths were seen to be consistently higher than U.S. combat deaths, and by a wide margin.* Other problems occurred with the Vietnamese data, but U.S. analysts devoted much effort to ensuring that the figures were as reliable as possible.

(U) The statistics are presented in Table 53 and are considered reliable enough for comparisons and trend analysis. The table indicates that the South Vietnamese lost about 160,000 military KIA and about 10,000 paramilitary KIA during 1965-72. The regular forces accounted for about 45 percent of the RVNAF KIA, with the territorial forces

TABLE 54. *Some 46,000 U.S. troops were killed in combat. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>MILITARY SERVICE</u>	<u>Prior to 1965</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>Total</u>
(U)Army	185	898	3073	5443	9333	6710	3508	1269	172	30,591
(U)Marine Corps	11	335	1681	3452	4618	2254	533	41	11	12,936
(U)Navy and Coast Guard	4	75	120	311	464*	295**	88	21	47*	1,425
(U)Air Force	<u>67</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>134</u>	<u>172</u>	<u>177</u>	<u>155</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>977</u>
(U)Total	267	1369	5008	9378	14592	9414	4221	1380	300	45,929

Source: "Casualties incurred by U.S. Military Personnel in Connection with the Conflict in Vietnam - Deaths Resulting from Actions by Hostile Forces", CAS 21.7, Directorate for Information Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller).

\* Includes 1 Coast Guard.  
\*\* Includes 3 Coast Guard



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TABLE 55. *Some 5,200 third-nation troops were killed in combat. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1965 (U)	1966 (U)	1967 (C)	1968 (C)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)	Total (C)
(C) Australia and New Zealand	15 <sup>a/</sup>	60	76	104	99	70	31	-	455
(C) Korea	17	506	1005	824	635	529	448	443	4407
(C) Philippines	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	-	8
(C) Thailand	-	-	16	51	132	105	47	-	351
(U) Total	32	566	1105	979	866	704	526	443	5221

Source: Table 50, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the  
Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) April 18, 1973, p. 1.

<sup>a/</sup> Includes one KIA from 1964.

(Regional and Popular Forces) accounting for the remaining 55 percent. As to trends, the RVNAF deaths were steady at about 12,000 per year for 1965-67, jumped sharply to 28,000 in 1968, then declined to a level of 23,000 during 1969-71. They rose to 40,000 in 1972, RVNAF's toughest year, when the South Vietnamese forces alone suffered almost as many combat deaths (39,600) as all Allied forces (United States, third nation, RVNAF) did (43,500) in 1968. *As with desertions (Chapter VII), the RVNAF combat deaths were a constant percentage of the force, 2.1 percent each year, except for 1968 (3.2 percent) and 1972 (3.4 percent).* The stability of the percentages is startling, and it suggests a steady state of RVNAF combat effort, which grew as the forces grew (Chapter IV) and as they fought 50 percent harder than normal when faced with the large VC/NVA offensives of 1968 and 1972.

#### U.S. COMBAT DEATHS

(U) The general levels and trends of U.S. combat deaths are presented here for comparison with the other Allied forces, but the detailed analysis of their causes, compositions, and locations follows in the next chapter. The importance of U.S. combat deaths as a burden and an issue in the war justifies detailed treatment. Table 54 shows that the U.S. Army and Marine Corps accounted for 95 percent of the 45,929 U.S. combat deaths through the end of 1972. United States deaths peaked in 1968 and then declined each year as U.S. troops withdrew. By 1972, the toll had declined to 300, down from 14,600 in 1968.

#### THIRD-NATION COMBAT DEATHS

(C) The Koreans accounted for about 85 percent of the 5,200 combat deaths of third-nation forces, as shown in Table 55.

#### RELATIVE INTENSITY OF THE COMBAT DEATH RATES

(U) Some indication of the intensity of combat for the various troops involved can be obtained by calculating the percentage of each force killed in combat each year. This neutralizes the effect of the force size and shows combat intensity more clearly when different-size forces are involved in the comparison. For example, it has already been noted that an average of about 40 percent of the VC/NVA forces were reportedly killed every year, with a peak of 60 percent killed in 1968.

(U) The percentage for South Vietnamese forces was much lower, as already noted, and it averaged about 2.5 percent annually for the entire period of 1965-72. It was more dangerous to be a member of the territorial forces (RF/PF) than to be in the regular forces, because 2.7 percent of the RF/PF force died each year, on average, compared to 2.3 percent of the regulars. This suggests that the odds of getting killed in the RF/PF were higher than in the regulars.

(U) The relative intensities of combat for the U.S. and third-nation forces was lower still, 1.8 percent for the U.S. troops and 1.3 percent for the third-nation forces. For comparison, historical data suggests that 6.7 percent of the French Expeditionary Forces were killed in Vietnam each year



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from 1946 through 1954. In Korea, the annual combat death rate for U.S. forces was about 5 percent of the force, although total U.S. combat deaths there (33,629) were below the U.S. total in Vietnam, because the war was shorter.

(U) In summary, the VC/NVA casualty rates in the Vietnam War were extremely high by any

standards, even if its losses turn out to be overstated by a large margin. The U.S. and South Vietnamese combat death *rates* from 1965 through 1972 were less than half of the *rates* suffered by the French in Vietnam and the Americans in Korea 1950-53, although the totals were much higher in both cases.



# Chapter XI

## U. S. Casualties Analyzed

(U) Every war has human and material costs. For the United States, the human costs of the Vietnam conflict are usually expressed in terms of American combat deaths, which approached 46,000 by the end of 1972. However, the human costs went beyond the number killed in action. United States forces suffered more than 10,000 deaths from nonhostile causes in Vietnam. In addition, 150,000 troops were hospitalized for wounds received in action, and thousands more were hospitalized for disease and nonbattle injuries. This chapter analyzes U.S. military casualties in Vietnam, with particular emphasis on deaths from combat and nonhostile causes. The analysis focuses on who died, where, and how. It also addresses the key factors that influenced the U.S. death rate—influenced it to the extent that the rate was actually predicted successfully for six months ahead during one period late in the war.

(U) Table 56 portrays the total number of U.S. casualties through March 31, 1973. In addition to the losses described above, 150,000 troops were wounded but did not require hospital care, another 1,200 were missing, and 750 were believed to have been captured at one point, with 650 of them returned to U.S. control by the end of March 1973.

### WHO DIED IN COMBAT?

(U) Table 57\* says that 88 percent of all U.S.

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\*Coast Guard deaths are included with the Navy in the combat deaths and nonhostile tables (5 KIA and 2 non-hostile deaths).

combat deaths in Vietnam were Army and Marine troops fighting on the ground. An analysis done in 1968 showed that 80 percent of all Army and Marine combat deaths were suffered by troops in maneuver units.<sup>(3)</sup> Thus, about 70 percent of all U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam were inflicted on Army and Marine troops serving in maneuver units.

(U) Almost 90 percent of the combat deaths were enlisted men, mostly in grades E3 and E4, the latter two grades accounting for 60 percent of all U.S. KIA. The figures are shown in Table 58, which also shows that the bulk of the Marine Corps enlisted men KIA were one grade lower than those of the Army and Navy. Only in the Air Force did officers account for a significant portion (68 percent) of the combat deaths. Later, Table 66 indicates that 85 percent of the Air Force deaths came from aircraft losses, in which the pilots and most of the flight crews were officers, so the pattern is not surprising.

(U) More than 85 percent of those who died in combat were 25 years of age or younger, with Army and Marine troops at the ages of 19, 20, and 21 accounting for about 60 percent of the overall total. Table 59 also shows that the Marines died at younger ages than their Army counterparts, about 80 percent of them dying at the age of 21 or below, compared to 60 percent for the Army.

(U) Table 60 indicates that 65 percent of the dead had served in the Armed Forces for less than two



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TABLE 56. *Some 56,000 U.S. troops died and more than 300,000 were wounded. (Table unclassified.)*

COMBAT CASUALTIES		Army	Navy <sup>a/</sup>	Marine Corps	Air Force	Total
1.	Killed	25,373	1,092	11,477	502	38,444
2.	Wounded or Injured					
a.	Died of wounds	3,518	146	1,451	48	5,163
b.	Nonfatal wounds					
	Hospital care required	96,810	4,178	51,392	932	153,312
	Hospital care not required	104,723	5,898	37,202	2,518	150,341
3.	Missing					
a.	Died while missing	1,689	187	5	449	2,330
b.	Returned to control	54	5	2	35	96
c.	Current missing	246	138	91	691	1,166
4.	Captured or Interned					
a.	Died while captured or interned	15	1	3	2	21
b.	Returned to control	133	145	37	333	648
c.	Current captured or interned	23	35	7	16	81
	TOTAL COMBAT DEATHS <sup>b/</sup>	30,595	1,426	12,936	1,001	45,958
NON-COMBAT CASUALTIES						
5.	Current Missing	103	-	14	-	117
6.	Deaths	7,147	882	1,681	593	10,303

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations, April 4, 1973, Cumulative from January 1, 1961 through March 31, 1973.

<sup>a/</sup> Navy figures include a small number of Coast Guard casualties.

<sup>b/</sup> Sum of lines 1, 2a, 3a, and 4a.

years, and half of them had served less than one year. The Marine KIA generally had served less time than had the Army dead; however, the length of service for many of the Army KIA is not shown in the data, and this may have influenced the result. On the other hand, the findings fit the pattern of youth already seen for the Marine Corps in the previous tables, so they are probably about right.

(U) *The one-year tour for all U.S. troops and the practice of a six-month tour for U.S. battalion commanders may have had the effect of raising the number of U.S. combat deaths. Twice as many troops died during the first six months of their tour as in the second six months (Table 61). After the first month, the number of deaths declined each month\* as the tour progressed. Thus, the longer one stayed alive after arriving in Vietnam, the better one's chances for survival, presumably as the result of a*

TABLE 57. *Soldiers and Marines fighting on the ground suffered 88 percent of the U.S. combat deaths. (Table unclassified.)*

	Army	Marines	Navy	AF	Total
Air	2508	575	244	851	4178
Ground	28087	12361	1126	150	41724
Sea	0	0	56	0	56
Total	30595	12936	1426	1001	45958

All U.S. Combat Deaths Through March 1973.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations, April 4, 1973.

\*Monthly data not shown.



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TABLE 58. *Ninety percent of the combat deaths were enlisted men. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Army</u>	<u>Marines</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>Air Force</u>	<u>Total</u>
Officers and Warrant Officers	3324	718	226	687	4955
Enlisted					
E6-9	2480	359	128	59	3026
E5	4116	598	202	97	5013
E4	9252	2030	434	103	11819
E3	11040	3841	414	52	15347
E2	296	5079	21	3	5399
E1	87	311	1	0	399
TOTAL ENLISTED	27271	12218	1200	314	41003
TOTAL	30595	12936	1426	1001	45958

All U.S. Combat Deaths through March 1973

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller),  
Directorate for Information Operations, April 4, 1973.

learning curve, which had to be repeated for each new arrival. It is conceivable that longer tours might have cut the toll.

(U) *Short tours of command for battalion commanders may have also had the effect of increasing U.S. combat deaths.* In South Vietnam during 1965 and 1966, U.S. Army maneuver battalions under experienced commanders suffered battle deaths in sizable fire fights at only two-thirds the rate of units under battalion commanders with less than six months' experience in command.<sup>(4)</sup> The short battalion commander tour apparently was not

unique to the Vietnam War, because World War II records suggest that many battalion commanders served six months or less in that conflict.<sup>(5)</sup> *In Vietnam at least, the data and comments from some commanders suggest that the short tours generated additional U.S. casualties.*

(U) Table 62 shows that whites accounted for 87 percent of the U.S. combat deaths. Blacks accounted for 12 percent; by comparison, the national population of males of military age in 1973 was 13.5 percent black.<sup>(6)</sup> About 14 percent of the enlisted deaths and 2 percent of the officers killed were blacks. The percentage of blacks in the U.S. Armed Forces at the end of 1972 were: enlisted, 13.5 percent; officers, 2.3 percent.<sup>(7)</sup> *Any*

TABLE 59. *Eighty-five percent died at 25 years of age or younger. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>Age at Death</u>	<u>Army</u>	<u>Marines</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>Air Force</u>	<u>Total</u>
17-18	1039	1557	13	0	2,609
19	3492	3393	113	9	7,007
20	8200	3486	269	26	11,981
21	5858	1787	262	36	7,943
Subtotal 19-21	17550	8666	644	71	26,931
22-25	7869	1902	436	214	10,421
26-30	2230	433	171	285	3,119
31-35	1067	231	86	229	1,613
Over 35	840	147	76	202	1,265
Total	30595	12936	1426	1001	45,958

All U.S. Combat Deaths through March 1973.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller),  
Directorate for Information Operations, April 4, 1973.

TABLE 60. *Sixty-five percent of the dead had served for less than two years. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>Length of Service</u>	<u>Army</u>	<u>Marines</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>Air Force</u>	<u>Total</u>
Less than 1 year	10232	4728	33	2	14995
1 to 2 years	9762	4750	306	35	14853
More than 2 years	7174	3453	1068	765	12460
Unknown	3427	5	19	199	3650
TOTALS	30595	12936	1421	1001	45958

All U.S. Combat deaths through March 1973

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller),  
Directorate for Information Operations, April 4, 1973.



TABLE 61. *Twice as many troops died during the first half of their tours as in the second half. (Table unclassified.)*

Months in Country	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force	Total
First three months	11502	3692	367	237	15798
Second three months	7489	2013	225	172	9899
Third three months	5045	1349	113	138	6645
Fourth three months	1714	569	52	70	2405
Over 12 months	653	176	47	15	893
Unknown-Not reported	32	3110	422	81	3645
TOTAL	26435	10909	1226	715	39285

U.S. Combat deaths January 1967 - December 1972.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information.

TABLE 62. *Blacks accounted for 12 percent of the combat deaths. (Table unclassified.)*

Race	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force	Total
Caucasian	26280	11209	1375	963	39827
Negro	3994	1600	38	30	5662
Other	321	127	13	8	469
Total	30595	12936	1426	1001	45958

All U.S. combat deaths through March 1973.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.

TABLE 63. *Draftees accounted for one-third of the U.S. combat deaths. (Table unclassified.)*

Category of Service	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force	Total
Regular	13037	11507	1261	716	26521
Reserve	2695	816	165	281	3957
National Guard	72	0	0	4	76
Selective Service (Draftees)	14791	613	0	0	15404
Total	30595	12936	1426	1001	45958

All U.S. combat deaths through March 1973

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information.

TABLE 64. *More than half of the U.S. combat deaths occurred in Military Region 1. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Military Region	Deaths	Percentage
MR 1	20,184	53%
MR 2	5,099	13%
MR 3	10,846	28%
MR 4	1,990	5%
MR Unknown	412	1%
TOTAL	38,531	100%

All U.S. Combat deaths January 1967-December 1972.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.

TABLE 65. *Ten provinces accounted for 77 percent of the U.S. combat deaths. (Table classified Confidential.)*

Province	U.S. Combat Deaths	Percentage
Quang Tri (MR 1)	6352	16%
Quang Nam (MR 1)	5725	15%
Thua Thien (MR 1)	3382	9%
Subtotal	15459	40%
Quang Ngai (MR 1)	2444	6%
Tay Ninh (MR 3)	2438	6%
Binh Duong (MR 3)	2413	6%
Quang Tin (MR 1)	2245	6%
Binh Dinh (MR 2)	1734	5%
Kontum (MR 2)	1526	4%
Hau Nghia (MR 3)	1303	4%
Subtotal	14103	37%
TOTAL - Ten Provinces	29562	77%
The 34 Other Provinces	8969	23%
GRAND TOTAL	38531	100%

All U.S. combat deaths January 1967 - December 1972

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.

*allegation that blacks bore an unfair burden in the Vietnam war, at least in terms of combat deaths, is not supported by the data.*

(U) Table 63 indicates that one-third of the U.S. killed in action were draftees, almost all (96 per-cent) serving in the Army. About half of the Army combat deaths were draftees, but only 5 percent of the Marine deaths were, although many were probably draft-induced. The regulars (many draft-induced) accounted for about 60 percent of all the combat deaths, and the reserves for only 9 percent. *The National Guard accounted for only 76 U.S. combat deaths, well below 1 percent of the total.*



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TABLE 66. *Causes of U.S. combat deaths; all deaths through March 1973. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>Aircraft Loss:</u>	<u>Army</u>	<u>Marines</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>USAF</u>	<u>Total</u>
Fixed Wing	84	132	172	775	1163
Helicopter	2424	443	72	76	3015
Subtotal	2508	575	244	851	4178
<u>Gunshot or Small Arms Fire</u>	12327	5638	398	22	18385
<u>Indirect Fire</u>					
Artillery/Rocket	2334	2117	319	109	4879
Other Explosion <u>a/</u>	4133	3064	259	15	7471
Multiple Fragmentation Wounds	7385	1004	75	1	8465
Subtotal	13852	6185	653	125	20815
<u>Other Causes</u>	1799	517	113	3	2432
<u>Unknown or Not Reported</u>	109	21	18	0	148
<u>Total</u>	30595	12936	1426	1001	45958

a/ Grenades, Mines and Bombs

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller),

Directorate for Information Operations

(U) The data furnish some clues about the description that would probably fit the majority of American combat deaths. *The typical American killed in action was a white, regular, enlisted man serving in an Army or Marine Corps maneuver unit. He was 21 years old or younger. He had served in Vietnam for less than six months and was in the military service for less than two years.*

#### WHERE DID THEY DIE IN COMBAT?

(C) Tables 64 and 65 show where the Americans died in combat. *Table 64 indicates that more than half (53 percent) were killed in Military Region 1 and most of the rest died in Military Region 3. Three provinces (7 percent of the total) accounted for 40 percent of the U.S. combat deaths. They were Quang Tri, Quang Nam, and Thua Thien. All three, as one would suspect, are in Military Region 1. The other provinces in Military Region 1 also had high U.S. casualty rates and appear among the ten highest provinces shown in Table 65. The ten provinces accounted for 77 percent of the U.S. combat deaths. The remaining 34 provinces accounted for the rest. The pattern suggests that U.S. forces were present in largest numbers and fought hardest in Military Region 1, in Kontum and Binh Dinh provinces of Military Region 2, and in Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, and Hau*

*Nghia provinces of Military Region 3. In sum, U.S. combat deaths were concentrated in some of the areas introduced in Chapter II as trouble spots since at least 1946.*

#### WHAT KILLED THEM?

(U) Table 66 shows that 9 percent of the U.S. combat dead were killed in aircraft losses, 40 percent died of gunshot wounds, and 45 percent were killed by some form of indirect fire. *More than two-thirds of the deaths from aircraft losses were Army and Marine Corps troops killed in helicopters. About 85 percent of the gunshot and indirect fire deaths were also suffered by soldiers and marines. The causes of death were distributed about the same in the Army and Marine Corps, except for deaths in the air. The Army lost 8 percent of its deaths in the air, compared to 4 percent for the Marine Corps. The other main differences are in the reporting of deaths from indirect fire. The Army reported that about 25 percent of its deaths were from multiple fragmentation wounds, while the Marines reported that the same percentage were killed by other explosives. This was probably no more than a difference in reporting style. The Marine Corps also reported a higher percentage of deaths (16 percent) from artillery or rocket fire than did the*



TABLE 67. *Eighty-two percent of the nonhostile U.S. deaths occurred in accidents. (Table unclassified.)*

ACCIDENTS	<u>Army</u>	<u>Marines</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>USAF</u>	<u>Total</u>
Aircraft Losses:					
Fixed Wing	284	47	200	284	815
Helicopter	<u>1920</u>	<u>246</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>2245</u>
Subtotal	2204	293	260	303	3060
Vehicle Loss/Crash	836	148	37	54	1075
Drowned Suffocated	633	168	190	24	1015
Burns	96	31	13	7	147
Accidental Self-					
Destruction	632	131	5	25	793
Accidental Homicide	581	312	59	21	973
Other Accidents	<u>867</u>	<u>402</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>1420</u>
Total Accidents	5849	1485	661	488	8483
ILLNESS					
Malaria-Hepatitis	451	98	29	41	619
Heart Attack-Stroke	<u>208</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>310</u>
Total Illnesses	659	126	53	91	929
INTENTIONAL HOMICIDE	159	22	4	5	190
SUICIDE	353	22	4	0	379
OTHER CAUSES	96	22	154	5	277
UNKNOWN OR NOT REPORTED	<u>31</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>45</u>
TOTAL	7147	1681	882	593	10303

Through March 1973.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller),  
Directorate for Information Operations, April

Army (8 percent). This, too, may only be a difference in reporting, but it may also reflect the intensity of rocket attacks on the Marine Corps bases in Military Region 1.\*

U.S. COMBAT DEATHS: CONCLUSION

(U) The analysis so far has addressed the U.S. combat deaths in terms of who died, where they died, and how they were killed. It shows that most of the Americans killed were young, white, enlisted men serving in Army and Marine Corps maneuver units. Most of them died in Military Region 1, in Kontum and Binh Dinh provinces of Military Region 2, and in Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, and Hau Nghia in Military Region 3. They died on the ground, of gunshot wounds or fragments from indirect fire.

\*The ambiguities of the data suggest that the analysts should be careful about drawing any conclusions from differences among the indirect fire categories.

U.S. DEATHS FROM NONCOMBAT CAUSES

(U) The analysis now turns to the U.S. deaths that resulted from accidents, illness, and other causes not directly related to combat.

HOW DID THEY DIE?

(U) Table 67 indicates that 82 percent of the 10,300 U.S. deaths not resulting from hostile action occurred in accidents. Illness and other causes accounted for 9 percent each. *The largest single cause of noncombat deaths was helicopter accidents, which accounted for 22 percent of the total.* Aircraft accidents of all types accounted for 30 percent of the deaths. (Only 9 percent of the combat deaths occurred in aircraft losses.) Such accidents accounted for half of the Air Force noncombat deaths, 30 percent of the Army and the Marine Corps deaths, and 17 percent of the Navy deaths. Other significant losses occurred from vehicle accidents, drownings, and accidental homicides and self-destruction.



TABLE 68. *United States combat and nonhostile deaths. (Table unclassified.)*

Deaths	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Combat	5008	9378	14592	9414	4221	1380	300
Non-Hostile	1045	1680	1919	2113	1844	968	261
Total	6053	11058	16511	11527	6065	2348	561
Non-Hostile Deaths as % of Total	17	15	12	18	30	41	47
Deaths per 1000 Troops <sup>a/</sup>							
Combat	18	21	28	20	11	6	5
Non-Hostile	3.8	3.8	3.7	4.4	4.9	4.3	4.7

"Non-Hostile U.S. Deaths in RVN", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, Jan-Feb 1971, p. 30. Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary and CAS 23.7 (through Jan 1973), Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operations.

<sup>a/</sup> Computed on a monthly basis using end of month strengths and averaging them for the year.

#### WHO DIED?

(U) The profile of the troops who died from noncombat causes is similar to those who died in combat, but the patterns are not as clear. Enlisted troops accounted for 83 percent of the noncombat deaths, compared to 89 percent of the combat deaths. Seventy-six percent of the noncombat dead were 25 years old or younger. The figure for combat deaths was 85 percent. Forty-two percent of the noncombat dead had been in the military service for less than two years, compared to 65 percent for combat deaths.

(U) The pattern of noncombat deaths as a function of length of service in Vietnam was much the same as for combat deaths. As time elapsed in a 12-month tour of duty, the chance of suffering a non-combat death declined. The first three months of the tour generated 31 percent of the noncombat deaths (compared to 40 percent of the combat deaths), and the percentage declined as the year progressed. In the final 3 months only 10 percent of the noncombat deaths occurred.

(U) In terms of race, the combat and noncombat death patterns were about the same: 84 percent of the noncombat deaths were white, compared to 87 percent of the combat deaths. About 15 percent of the noncombat deaths were among blacks, compared to 12 percent of the combat deaths.

#### NONCOMBAT DEATHS: CONCLUSION

(U) The troops killed in noncombat incidents represented much the same profile as those who

died in combat, although the noncombat deaths were more evenly distributed throughout the forces. *The most striking factor about the noncombat deaths was the large number resulting from helicopter crashes: A total of 5,260 Americans died in helicopters during the Vietnam War, 43 percent as results of accidents.*

#### WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCED THE NUMBER OF U.S. DEATHS?

(U) Two basic factors had to be present for U.S. deaths to occur. One was U.S. troops and the other was the action that killed them. This suggests that U.S. force levels could be an important influence on the levels of combat deaths and non-combat deaths. Table 68 shows the relationship, expressed as deaths per 1,000 U.S. troops. It suggests that combat deaths are heavily influenced by something besides troop strengths, because the deaths per thousand troops did not remain constant, but followed the intensity of combat in South Vietnam until 1972, building to a peak in 1968 and then declining every year thereafter. By 1972 there were so few U.S. troops left in South Vietnam that the 1972 offensive had little effect on the U.S. death rates. So, the troop strength was an important factor in the number of U.S. combat deaths, but it cannot explain all of the fluctuations in those rates. The other factors are discussed below, after consideration of the non-combat deaths.

#### WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCED U.S. NONCOMBAT DEATH RATES?

(U) Noncombat deaths were directly related to U.S. troop strength. The relatively consistent behavior of the number of noncombat deaths per 1,000 troops in the last seven years is a clear indication of this. The increase during 1969-72 (Table 68) was most likely related to the following factors. Troops previously in combat were engaged more and more in noncombat-related duties (for example, maintaining equipment, training, construction). Accidents related to these activities would contribute to noncombat death rates and could be expected to rise slightly. With fewer combat operations, more free time was available to the troops, possibly resulting in more mishaps during off-duty hours. The lowering of morale, the drug and race problems in South Vietnam, and



easy access to alcoholic beverages (and greater opportunities to use them) could have contributed to a rise in noncombat deaths. The mix of U.S. forces changed as combat troops were withdrawn faster than support forces. Combat troops accounted for 28 percent of the total U.S. force in July 1969, when withdrawals started. Two years later, only 21 percent were combat troops. By then, U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam had been reduced by 65 percent, compared to a 54 percent reduction of total U.S. forces. In sum, after mid-1969, a higher percentage of the U.S. forces were located in cities and in densely populated U.S. bases. These are the places where deaths from noncombat causes are probably more likely to occur.

(U) The stability of the noncombat death and troop strength relationship is supported by a detailed examination of the noncombat deaths per 10,000 troops each month for the five years from 1966 through 1970. The analysis showed that the ratio remained within a narrow range. At its *widest* extremes, it never went below 2.1 deaths per 10,000 troops per month or above 5.4.<sup>(8)</sup> Thus, it seems safe to conclude that the level of non-combat U.S. deaths in South Vietnam was fundamentally determined by the numbers and types of U.S. forces stationed there.

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCED U.S. COMBAT DEATH RATES?

(U) As already seen, troop strength alone does not explain the fluctuations in U.S. combat death rates. An analysis of U.S. combat deaths in South Vietnam from 1965 through 1970 suggested that two factors influenced the levels of U.S. combat deaths. The first was the yearly cycle of combat, which peaked during the spring and ebbed in early summer and fall. The second was the level and type of U.S. troop strength which, during periods of low activity, seemed to establish a floor or minimum level of U.S. combat deaths.

(U) Using these two observations as a starting point, the analysis attempted in December 1970 to estimate the probable number of U.S. combat deaths for each of the next six months (January through June 1971).<sup>(9)</sup> The forecast began with the previous year's data averaged around a given month and then adjusted for current trends and

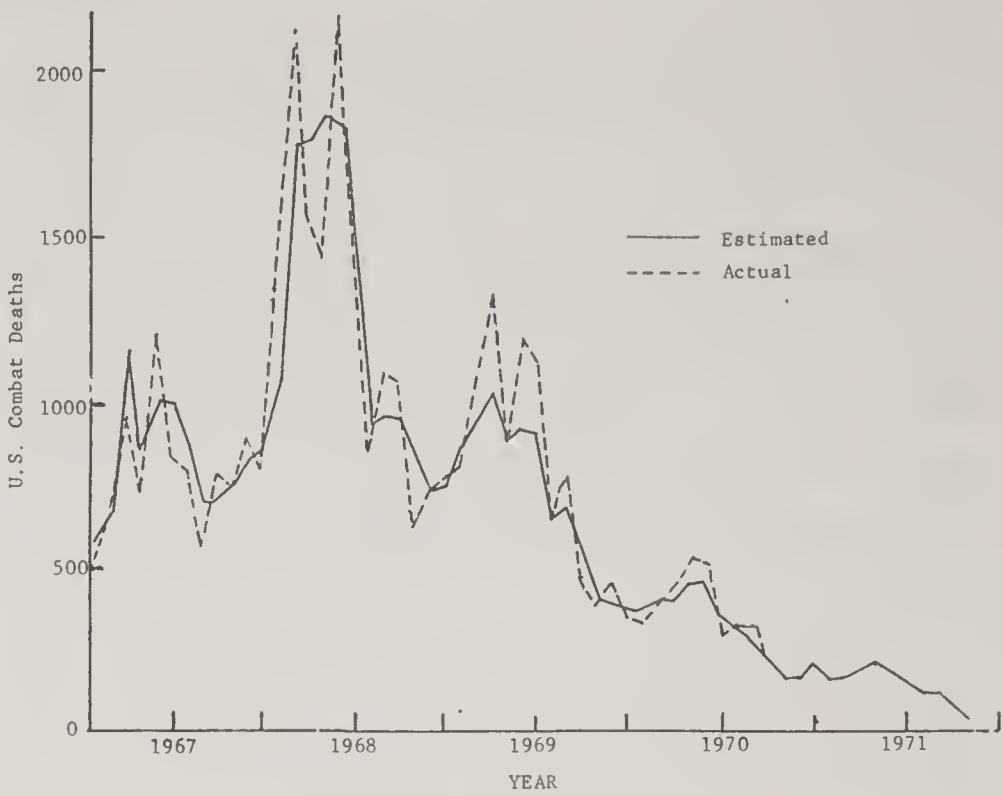


Figure 12. United States combat deaths in South Vietnam. (Figure unclassified.)

TABLE 69. *The percentage reductions of the United States KIA and U.S. maneuver battalions moved together. (Table unclassified.)*

	1970	1971	1972
% Reduction of U.S. KIA <sup>a/</sup>	-55%	-67%	-78%
% Reduction of U.S. Maneuver Battalions <sup>a/</sup>	-43%	-70%	-100%

<sup>a/</sup> Reduction from the previous year.

magnitudes. The results of this exercise are portrayed in Fig. 12, which shows actual combat deaths (dash line) and estimated combat deaths (solid line) over a four-year period. Although the technique appeared to work well for the past, the uncertainty of the forecast was still great. The chances were estimated as one in three that the actual number of combat deaths in any given month would be outside the range predicted.

(U) As it turned out, the forecast of combat deaths was remarkably accurate on two counts and less satisfactory on a third. The prediction called for an average of 42 U.S. combat deaths per week<sup>(9)</sup> for the six-month period and the actual figure was 43. In addition, the forecast traced the month-to-month patterns fairly well. The three months predicted to be highest were highest and the three predicted to be lowest were lowest. On the third count, however, the average monthly error was 22 percent. Thus, the forecast picked the average level of combat deaths correctly and



predicted which months would be high and which would be low, but did less well on estimating each monthly figure.

(U) Encouraged by the results, the analysts attempted to predict U.S. combat deaths for the next six months (June through December 1971). This time an average of 20 combat deaths per week was estimated for the period. The actual figure, happily, was 11. Only one month fell within the predicted range.<sup>(10)</sup>

(U) What went wrong? The answer lies in the tempo of Communist activity and in the redeployment of U.S. maneuver battalions from South Vietnam during the period.

(U) Part of the answer is that the VC/NVA attack rate, a good sign of their willingness to fight and which correlated well with U.S. combat deaths, dropped 50 percent in the second half of 1971, the period of the second forecast. [For a discussion of the relationship between the VC/NVA attack rate and U.S. combat deaths, see Chapter IX.<sup>(11)</sup>] In the previous year, 1970, attacks had dropped only 30 percent in the second half. The same had been true in 1969. So the attacks, and therefore the VC/NVA willingness or ability to increase the tempo of combat, were overestimated.

(U) The second factor not taken fully into account was the effect of withdrawing U.S. maneuver battalions. Recall that U.S. Army and Marine

Corps maneuver battalions accounted for about 70 percent of all U.S. combat deaths in the Vietnam War. If a large portion of the U.S. maneuver battalions in South Vietnam were withdrawn, it would be reasonable to expect a proportional decrease in U.S. combat deaths. The forecast was based on a planned withdrawal of 71,000 U.S. troops during the six-month period, a decline of 28 percent. The actual reduction was 34 percent. More important, U.S. maneuver battalions were reduced from 33 at the beginning of the period to 16 at the end of it, a reduction of 52 percent, the largest percentage reduction up to that time. Symbolic of the change, on July 1, 1971, the start of the forecast period, MACV announced the "biggest single cutback of American troops in Vietnam" up to that time, 40 Army units with an authorized strength of 6,095 men being pulled out of combat that month. The strong role of the maneuver battalions in setting U.S. combat death rates is suggested by Table 69. It shows that the percentage reductions of U.S. combat deaths and of U.S. maneuver battalions for 1970 through 1972 are quite similar.

(U) It seems reasonably clear that the low VC/NVA combat levels, the high percentage of maneuver battalions withdrawn, and the small number of maneuver battalions left in the country (which signified the end of the U.S. offensive role in ground combat) together reduced the U.S. combat death rates below the estimate.



## Chapter XII

### How Many Civilian Casualties?

(U) "Statistics are not available which would permit an estimate to be made of civilian casualties in Vietnam caused by U.S./ARVN/FWMAF/VC/NVA in the course of military operations," according to the State Department early in 1970.<sup>(12)</sup> What the Department should have said is that *no official U.S. estimate of civilian casualties exists for the Vietnam War*, because statistics *are* available which permit estimates of the toll. Indeed, an estimate is developed here and compared with another one made by the Kennedy Subcommittee on Refugees. But it is important to remember that both estimates, as well as any others, are unofficial guesses.

#### THE FRAGMENTARY DATA

(U) Civilian casualties are found in two types of data: in records of civilian war casualties admitted to U.S. military or GVN hospitals and in computer records of combat actions. The combat actions data are incomplete and obviously fragmentary, because none of the civilian casualties resulting from U.S. or third-nation combat actions are recorded. So the focus here is on the hospital admissions data, which appear to be more nearly complete and are the best statistics to use as the point of departure for an estimate of civilian casualties. The data are shown in Table 70.

(U) The table suggests that the average monthly rate of civilian war casualties admitted to hospitals ranged from about 3,000 per month in 1971 to about 7,000 per month in 1968. But actual civilian casualties surely were much higher. The most

obvious omissions from the hospital data were the civilian casualties who were never admitted to a GVN or U.S. hospital. This included civilians killed outright, those treated as outpatients at a hospital or in the field, and those treated by doctors or hospitals outside of the reporting system. The count of hospitals includes only the GVN and U.S. hospitals, although these were the vast majority. It does not include the two or three hospitals run by private charitable groups, such as the Catholics and American Friends.<sup>(13)</sup> Civilian war casualties treated at such hospitals were not included in the table. Chinese doctors practicing traditional Chinese medicine may have treated some casualties, and the VC/NVA may have treated still others. Also, the reporting of hospital admissions was not precise. Senate investigators in 1968 claimed that 10 percent of the GVN hospitals were not reporting at all.<sup>(14)</sup> On the basis of spot checks in those that did report, they claimed that the figures were 10 to 50 percent below the number of civilian casualties actually present in the hospitals.<sup>(15)</sup> Finally, no data from 1972 are shown in the table, because the intense combat in that year, with its high patient loads, washed out the remaining reliability of the statistics.

(U) Despite all these problems, the hospital admissions data are the best point of departure for estimating civilian casualties.<sup>(15)</sup> Moreover, the availability of hospital treatment and its quality rose sharply in 1966-70 because of major U.S. efforts to improve them.



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TABLE 70. Hospital admissions summary. From the statement of R. H. Nooter before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, May 8, 1972, page 40. (Table unclassified.)

CY	Civilian War Casualties			Total Hospital Admissions From All Causes
	Total	GVN Hospitals	U.S. Military Hospitals	
1967	48,734	46,783	1,951	473,140
1968	84,492	76,702	7,790	456,972
1969	67,767	59,223	8,544	525,772
1970	50,882	46,247	4,635	574,814
1971	39,395	38,318	1,077	597,423

(U) Table 71 shows that the hospital admissions data for civilian war casualties fluctuated with the intensity of the war, as measured by Allied combat deaths. Furthermore, the relationship was strong, as shown by the narrow range of the ratios shown in the table, although *civilian hospital admissions fell faster than military combat deaths in 1970 and 1971*. Movement of the war out of densely populated areas in those years, as indicated by the population control figures in Chapter XIII and by the air sortie data shown later in this chapter, could account for the downturn.

(U) Another type of downturn is suggested upon returning to Table 70. Civilian war casualties as a percentage of total hospital admissions dropped from 18 percent in 1968 to 6 percent in 1970. Total admissions went up every year as medical care and facilities increased. This undoubtedly influenced the percentages shown, but it is not enough to account for the entire change. The increase in medical care may even have led to better reporting of civilian war casualties after 1968; but in the absence of solid evidence, this must remain an assumption. At any rate, the trend of civilian casualties, as measured by the hospital admissions data from 1968 through 1971, was clearly down, until 1972.

## TWO ESTIMATES OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

(U) Two estimates of total civilian casualties in South Vietnam for 1965 through 1972 are discussed here. The first is constructed, step by step, while the second is an estimate made by Senator

TABLE 71. Hospital admissions of civilian war casualties move with military combat deaths, but fell faster in 1970 and 1971. (Table unclassified.)

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
Total RVNAF/U.S./ Third Nation Combat Deaths (000) <u>a/</u>	23	44	32	28	25
Hospital Admissions of Civilian War Casualties (000) <u>b/</u>	49	85	68	51	39
Ratio	2.1	1.9	2.1	1.8	1.6

a/ Source: Chapter X.

b/ Source: Table 70, preceding.

Kennedy's U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees.

### FIRST ESTIMATE

(U) The first estimate addresses three kinds of civilian war casualties: those admitted to hospitals, wounded who didn't need hospital care or couldn't get it, and deaths.

(U) From the ratios between military combat deaths and hospital admissions shown in Table 71, it is possible to develop an estimate of hospital admissions of civilian war casualties for the missing years—1965, 1966, and 1972. There were 1.9 war-casualty admissions, on the average, for each Allied combat death from 1967 through 1971. Applying this factor to the killed-in-action figures for 1965, 1966, and 1972\* yields a total of 135,000 assumed hospital admissions of civilian war casualties for those three years. Adding this to the Table 71 figures yields a grand total of 427,000 hospital admissions for the period from 1965 through 1972. But the Senate investigators claim that the reported figures are too low, on the basis of some spot checks at provincial hospitals and the fact that some hospitals and doctors are outside the reporting system. To compensate, the 427,000 is increased by 20 percent, which yields a new total of 512,000, and that figure rounds off to 515,000.

(U) In December 1967 the former Assistant Director of USAID's Public Health Division in Saigon estimated that hospital admissions probably represented about 50 percent of all wounded Vietnamese civilians.<sup>(16)</sup> He further suggested that

\*See Chapter X for the KIA figures.



TABLE 72. *Shelling and bombing as causes of civilian casualties dropped from 43 percent to 22 percent of the total. (Table unclassified.)*

	Mine & Mortar	Gun/ Grenade	Shelling & Bombing	Total
1967	15,253	9,785	18,811	43,849
1968	31,244	15,107	28,052	74,403
1969	24,648	11,814	16,183	52,645
1970	22,049	7,650	8,607	38,306

Source: W. E. Colby, Statement to the Senate Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees, April 21, 1972, p.41 and Annex K.

the additional 50 percent consisted of 30 percent who suffered minor wounds not requiring hospital treatment and 20 percent who were killed outright or died before reaching a hospital.<sup>(16)</sup> Applying these "rules of thumb" to the raw hospital-admissions estimate would yield a total of 854,000 casualties for the period from 1965 through 1972, comprising 427,000 hospital admissions, 256,000 minor wounded, and 171,000 deaths. Adding the 20 percent factor would take the total to 1,025,000, which would include 205,000 deaths.

(U) The military casualty data lend some credence to the AID official's factors. His estimate of civilian war deaths works out to one death per 2.5 seriously wounded (hospital admissions), compared to one RVNAF death per 2.65 seriously wounded\* for the period from 1965 through 1972. His notion that one additional casualty exists for each one admitted to a hospital gets some support from the U.S. wounded-in-action figures for the period from 1965 through 1972.† Those numbers indicate one minor injury (not hospitalized) in addition to each serious wound (hospitalized). But in the U.S. case, the killed must be added to the entire total; they do not come out of the minor-wounded category.

(U) Application of the RVNAF factor of 2.65 seriously wounded for each combat death, plus the U.S. pattern of doubling the wounded number and then adding the KIA, plus adding 20 percent to the hospital admissions figure, yields a 1965-72 war casualty total of 1,225,000, which would include

\*RVNAF wounded figures include only those hospitalized. The U.S. ratio of killed to hospitalized wounded for 1965 through 1972 is one killed for 3.5 wounded.

†See Chapter XI.

515,000 hospitalized, 515,000 more not hospitalized, and 195,000 killed.

(U) There is some evidence to suggest that most of the civilians wounded, but not hospitalized, probably suffered from minor wounds not requiring a trip to the hospital. For example, U.S. military medical officers and technicians, as part of civic action programs in the countryside, administered more than 2.2 million outpatient treatments to the civilian population in 1969 alone, including 16,000 treatments of civilian war casualties.<sup>(17)</sup>‡ This suggests that widespread medical treatment was being made available to the rural areas. Moreover, in the 25 months from January 1969 through February 1971, a total of 102,406 Vietnamese civilians (not restricted to war casualties) were transported by U.S. medical aircraft, some 98,100 by helicopter.<sup>(18)</sup> This all suggests that, especially where Allied troops were operating and where U.S. district advisory teams were functioning, civilian casualties had a reasonable chance of receiving medical care and evacuation to hospitals if required. *If this is so, it indicates that the civilian casualties can be stated as 195,000 killed, 515,000 seriously wounded, and 515,000 not seriously wounded. This suggests a toll in serious casualties that was closer to 700,000 than to 1,225,000.*

#### SECOND ESTIMATE

(U) The U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected With Refugees and Escapees estimated that civilian war casualties in South Vietnam were higher: 415,000 killed and 935,000 wounded, for a total of 1,350,000 civilian casualties.<sup>(19)</sup>

#### COMPARISON

(U) The totals of the two estimates are not very far apart. The principal difference lies in the toll of civilians killed; 195,000 as opposed to 415,000. This is a significant difference, and there is no way to resolve it. The higher estimate assumes that the civilian casualty pattern is markedly different from the military pattern, in terms of the ratio of killed to wounded. The lower estimate assumes that the patterns are similar. It also makes a dis-

‡For an account of U.S. Army medical aid to civilians see Ref. 18. Some of the war casualties may have been admitted to GVN or U.S. hospitals and also picked up in those figures.



TABLE 73. Were any friendly artillery or air strikes directed in or near the inhabited area of this village this month? (Table unclassified.)

(Percentage of Population)				
	Dec. 69	Dec. 70	Dec. 71	Dec. 72
	%	%	%	%
No	69.8	83.5	89.0	82.7
Yes:				
Once	3.1	4.7	2.7	4.8
Sporadically	16.2	9.4	5.8	8.2
Repeatedly	7.8	2.2	2.3	3.7
Sub-Total	27.1	16.3	10.8	16.7

Source: Hamlet Evaluation System computer printout of question  
VMC-2 for months shown.

inction between serious wounds and minor wounds.

(U) The high estimate suggests that civilian casualties averaged about 165,000 per year. The low estimate suggests a maximum of 150,000 per year, with about 85,000 being seriously wounded or killed. In either case, the casualties amounted to less than 1 percent of the population each year, with the low estimate's seriously wounded and killed hovering at about 0.5 percent. This is not to belittle the losses, which were tragic, but to place them in some perspective and to indicate

TABLE 74. Air strikes moved away from the population. (Table classified Confidential.)

	Jan. 1969 <sup>b/</sup>	Jan. 1971 <sup>b/</sup>	Jan. 1972 <sup>c/</sup>
	(U)	(U)	(C)
POPULATION (Thousands-000)			
Within 1 km of air strikes	700	150	100
From 1-2 km	1,240	330	230
From 2-3 km	1,330	420	310
Outside 3 km	10,900	15,100	17,910
No UTM's reported	2,600 <sup>a/</sup>	1,900 <sup>a/</sup>	250
RVN Total	16,770	17,900	18,800
Cumulative Percent of Population with Reported UTM Locations			
Within 1 km of air strikes	5.0	0.9	0.5
Within 2 km	13.7	3.0	1.8
Within 3 km	23.0	5.6	3.5

<sup>a/</sup> Includes Saigon's 1.7 million population.  
<sup>b/</sup> Source: "Air Strikes Near RVN Population", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, March - April 1971, p. 29.  
<sup>c/</sup> Source: "Air Strikes Near RVN Population", unpublished paper by Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis), October 17, 1972, p. 3.

that they (plus the military losses) were not large enough to keep the population from growing by 3 percent or so each year during the period 1965-72.

CAUSES

(U) Much of the discussion in the United States about civilian casualties seemed to imply that the U.S. forces and their firepower were responsible for most, if not all, of them. This, of course, is nonsense: The Communists systematically attacked civilians. The RVNAF troops reported some civilian casualties from their operations, and the Koreans allegedly inflicted high civilian casualties in their areas of operation. However, the U.S., while not reporting them in the combat records, inevitably must have caused quite a few, given the kind of war that was fought in Vietnam.

(U) But as the Allied forces succeeded in pushing the war out of the populated areas, evidence emerges that the VC/NVA became increasingly responsible for the civilian casualties. The hospital-admissions data furnish the clues. The GVN Ministry of Health required that reports be submitted by ministry hospitals on the causes of wounds. No absolute conclusion can be drawn from these, but they can be crudely grouped as inflicted by the VC/NVA (mines, mortars), either side (guns, grenades), or the Allies (bombing, artillery). Table 72 suggests a clear increase in the



TABLE 75. *The more secure the hamlet, the less chance of an air strike near it (population in millions). (Table classified Confidential.)*

POPULATION WITHIN 3 KILOMETERS OF AIR STRIKES	Jan. 1969	Jan. 1971	Jan. 1972
<b>A-B Hamlets</b>			
Pop. Near Air Strikes	.9 (17%)	.5 (4%)	.3 (2%)
Pop. Not Near	4.5	10.9	15.2
<b>C Hamlets</b>			
Pop. Near Air Strikes	1.0 (19%)	.3 (9%)	.2 (8%)
Pop. Not Near	4.3	3.4	2.2
<b>D-E-VC Hamlets</b>			
Pop. Near Air Strikes	1.4 (41%)	.1 (11%)	.1 (17%)
Pop. Not Near	2.0	.8	.5
<b>All Hamlets</b>			
Pop. Near Air Strikes	3.3 (23%)	.9 (6%)	.6 (3%)
Pop. Not Near	10.8	15.1	17.9

Source: "Air Strikes Near RVN Population", *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*, March-April 1971, p. 30.

percentage of VC/NVA-inflicted wounds, a moderate drop in those inflicted by either side, and a 50 percent drop in those caused by the Allies.

(U) The downward trend for shelling and bombing in Table 71 is supported by data from the Hamlet Evaluation System and from analysis of air strikes near populated areas. The Hamlet Evaluation System asked, "Were any friendly artillery or air strikes directed in or near the inhabited areas of this village\* this month?" Negative answers increased noticeably from December 1969 through December 1971, as shown in Table 73. The increased intensity of combat in 1972 shows up as fewer negative replies in 1972.

#### AIR STRIKES NEAR THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

(U) A much clearer picture of the downward trend in Allies-caused civilian casualties emerges from an analysis of air strikes in relation to hamlet locations. It yields a much more precise result, one that shows a sharp decline in air strikes near populated areas between January 1969 and January 1972.

(U) The distance of air strikes from hamlets is one measure of how close the main-force war was to the population. As pacification proceeded, and as Allied forces gained superiority over the VC/NVA main forces, the distance ought to have increased. As a result, the likelihood of civilian casualties and disruption of civilian life should decrease. To

\*A village in Vietnam is an area similar to a township in the United States; the sum of all of the villages adds up to the entire area of South Vietnam.



Figure 13. South Vietnam air strike locations, January 1969. (Figure classified Confidential.)

measure the distance of tactical air sorties from population centers in South Vietnam, the following data were used:

- *Air strike locations.* Computerized pilot reports from the JCS-J3 COACT (1969) and 7th Air Force OPREP 4/SEADAB (1971 and 1972) systems. One set of UTM coordinates is available for each fighter attack mission (consisting of an average of two sorties) that dropped ordnance. Similar data on B-52 bombers and helicopter gunships are not available.
- *Population locations.* MACV/CORDS Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) data, contained in





Figure 14. South Vietnam air strike locations, January 1971. (Figure classified Confidential.)

computer tapes sent to Washington (see Chapter XII). United States district advisors provided coordinates for the centers of all 12,000 reported hamlets in South Vietnam, containing about 16 million people. Saigon's 2 million people are excluded from the analysis for 1969 and 1971, because air strikes rarely occurred there, and detailed coordinates were not reported for all precincts until 1972.

(U) Clearances for air strikes in populated areas were required in advance from either the province chief or Vietnamese military commanders responsible for the area. The friendly civilian population was supposed to have advance warning that their

area was in a target zone. The HES was not sensitive enough to reflect temporary population movements, so the exact numbers of people actually present in their hamlets on the days and hours of the reported air strikes is not known. Therefore, all inhabitants are assumed to be present. Three sample months were selected for the analysis, that is, January in each of 1969, 1971, and 1972. Thus, since they spanned a three-year period, they should reveal any meaningful trends.

(C) Air strikes affected less of the population in 1972 than in 1969 or 1971.<sup>(20)</sup> Table 74 shows that in January 1969, twenty-three percent of the population had one or more air strikes within 3 km (2 miles) of their hamlet; in January 1972, the figure dropped to less than 4 percent. A better measure, *the population directly affected by the air strikes—that is, within 1 km (0.6 mile)—fell from 5 percent in 1969 to 0.5 percent in 1972.* Thus, the air-strike data support the trends shown in the hospital-admissions data, which are used as the basis for judging the proportion of civilian casualties that can be attributed to each side.

(C) There are at least two reasons for the improvement. First, military operations and pacification separated the main-force war from the population, so the distance of sorties from hamlets increased. In 1969, thirty-two percent of all attack missions were flown within 3 km of hamlets; by 1971, the figure was down to 16 percent.<sup>(21)</sup> Second, the number of tactical air strikes flown in South Vietnam declined in each month shown, from 17,500 in January 1969 to 3,620 in January 1972.<sup>(22)</sup>

(C) Movement of the war away from the population was the more important of the two reasons. As noted earlier, 23 percent of the population of South Vietnam lived within 3 km of air strikes during January 1969, when 17,500 attack sorties were flown. In April 1972, the same level of air activity (17,200 attack sorties) affected only 14 percent of the population.<sup>(23)</sup> Table 75 provides further support for the pacification explanation by showing that the more secure the hamlet was, the less was the chance of an air strike near it. Moreover, for the "secure" (A-B) and "relatively secure" (C) hamlets, chances of an air strike nearby declined as time passed. Add to this the increase in secure population during the period,



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and it is clear that the main reason for fewer air strikes near hamlets was the movement of the war away from populated areas, not the reduction in air sorties. And this probably contributed to the decline in civilian casualties reflected in the hospital-admissions figures.

(C) Map plots of the data help to show the improved nature of the air war. Air mission locations are plotted as small black squares on a map showing the population locations as gray areas. In 1969 there were many areas of dense sortie

concentrations (Fig. 13), two (Quang Nam province in Military Region 1 and the U.S. 9th Division area in Military Region 4) seeming to be located very close to population centers.<sup>(24)</sup> These two areas were strongly contested in 1969, with large main-force units in combat. In January 1971 there were very few dense concentrations, except for a few in the very sparsely populated A Shau Valley (Military Region 1), Cambodian border (Military Region 3), and U Minh Forest (Military Region 4) areas; see Fig. 14.<sup>(24)</sup>

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PART FOUR  
THE PACIFICATION DIMENSION

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## Chapter XIII

### Trying to Measure Population Security

(U) The most important objective of both sides in a war without fronts is control of the population, not the destruction of the enemy's armed forces. Influence (or control) over the population, and support from it, is what such a war is about, and Mao Tse Tung, Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and others understood this principle very well. So did the British in Malaya and Magsaysay in the Philippines. The Americans (and French) gave it lip service in Vietnam, but the bulk of the effort was never directed to this objective. In the U.S. case, the attrition strategy dominated, as shown by the pattern of resource allocation described in Chapter III. Nonetheless, the pacification program, especially after 1967, when resources began to flow into it, made significant strides in gaining population support for the Government of Vietnam.

(U) Security for the South Vietnamese population from Viet Cong and North Vietnamese harassment and exploitation always had to be an essential part of pacification in South Vietnam and a key objective of the U.S./GVN war effort, although it was given much less emphasis than attrition was. Security of the populace is used here as a key criterion for evaluating the progress of pacification, although the pacification effort, despite its relatively meager resources, encompassed much more. Efforts to measure the level of security began at least as early as 1963, well before the commitment of U.S. ground combat forces in mid-1965, and it continued throughout the war amidst publicity and controversy. This chapter describes the devel-

opment and evolution of the systems designed to measure security of the populace, presents the trends they showed, and discusses their validity.

#### THE MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS

(U) Vietnamese attempts to measure the security of the population began at least as early as 1963, and it featured a wide variety of systematic reports about the situation in the countryside.<sup>(1)</sup> \* However, the reporting was oversimplified and of poor quality, and it exaggerated the amount of security that actually existed in the countryside. For example, after the death of President Ngo Dinh Diem in November 1963, the number of "secure" hamlets in Long An Province was revised downward from over 200 to about 10. The discussion begins with the joint GVN-U.S. reporting system that was adopted in May 1964 and that continued in use until June 1967, when the U.S. Hamlet Evaluation System became the single, official system.

(U) The GVN/U.S. system† attempted to portray military security, with little emphasis on administrative control and economic development. Reports on each hamlet in the GVN pacification plan were developed by the U.S. district advisor and the Vietnamese district chief and sent separately to their respective headquarters at the province level and in Saigon. The U.S. advisor was

\*References for Part Four begin on page 939.

†A detailed description of the GVN-U.S. system and its shortcomings appears in Ref. 2.



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supposed to make an independent assessment, but this was often impossible, because he seldom knew the history of his district very well and he had to rely on Vietnamese interpreters to obtain information in the hamlets. Thus, the system is best described as a joint GVN/U.S. one.

(U) There is probably an optimistic bias in the 1964-67 statistics, because the reporting tended to concentrate on changes resulting from ongoing work. As a result, backsliding in areas previously "pacified" probably didn't show up as well as progress in active areas. The data support the notion of an optimistic bias.

(U) A major new departure occurred in January 1967, when U.S. advisors began reporting their evaluations of hamlet status through the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). Shortcomings in the previous GVN/U.S. reporting of population and hamlet control in South Vietnam led the Secretary of Defense (in October 1966) to request a better system for measuring pacification progress, and HES was the result. The HES was designed to yield comprehensive, quantifiable data on the security and development of every hamlet in South Vietnam under some degree of GVN control and to identify hamlets that were under VC/NVA control. Data collation at the Saigon level was completely automated for computer processing, and duplicates of the MACV computer tapes were sent to Washington.

(U) The basic evaluation of each hamlet's status came from the lowest possible level of the U.S. advisory chain—the district advisors who filled out the work sheets. Each hamlet was evaluated on six factors, with three indicators in each factor, and each indicator graded from A (=best) to E (=bad), for a total of 18 grades per hamlet. Three of the factors related to the security status of the hamlet: VC/NVA military activities, Viet Cong political and subversive activities, and Allied capabilities. The other three measured development status: administrative and political activities, economic development, and health, education, and welfare. The letter grade assigned to each factor depended on the numerical scores given to each indicator, and the average of the six factor grades determined the single composite grade for the hamlet. The reporter also stated the level of confidence he placed on his evaluation. In addition,

information regarding problem areas in each hamlet was reported, and this was also sent to Washington.

(U) The system was a U.S. reporting system, although American advisors had to work closely with their Vietnamese counterparts in implementing parts of it. This turned out to be a critically important difference from the old GVN/U.S. system, because it gave the U.S. advisor complete control of the final scores and enabled him to make an independent report on the pacification performance of his Vietnamese counterpart. Also, the new system represented the view from the cutting edge, since higher echelons were not allowed to change the ratings.

(U) The top Vietnamese officials in Saigon came to rely on the HES as an independent report card on their provincial and district leaders, and this gave U.S. advisors in the field a good deal of leverage on the latter. While pacification always remained a Vietnamese program, in contrast to the military effort, it was graded by the Americans, and even the President and Prime Minister of South Vietnam acted on the reports.

(U) The district HES reports were collated, although they could not be changed, by the U.S. interagency province team before being sent to MACV for countrywide collation. The results were displayed in computer printouts and monthly summaries.

(U) In setting up the system, MACV ran into problems, but it made rapid progress. For example, a complete and accurate inventory of the hamlets in South Vietnam was not available. No census had been taken for years. In compiling a new inventory and checking the location and characteristics of each hamlet in the system, MACV found that many hamlets no longer existed or that they were unpopulated. These were dropped from the lists.

(U) In addition to the ratings, basic elements of information reported in the Hamlet Evaluation System included the name of the hamlet, its UTM coordinate location, its village, district, province, and military region, and its population. The system also provided information regarding the control status of the population residing outside officially recognized hamlets (for example, in



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TABLE 76. *The old HES was more subjective than HES/70. (Table unclassified.)*

"Old HES" January 1967-December 1969	HES/70 (Tested July-December 1969) Began January 1970
Summary: Subjective "A-E" ratings by District Senior advisors (DSAs)	Summary: Objective "factual" reports by DSAs; conversion to experts' A-E ratings
37 multiple-choice questions per month per hamlet (18 indicators, 19 problem areas)	21 monthly hamlet questions 4 monthly village questions 56 quarterly hamlet questions 58 quarterly village questions
Training required to make ratings	Asks detailed questions about verifiable facts
Different DSAs used different criteria at different times	Standard countrywide rating criteria did not change over time
Gaps in coverage (e.g., economics, information, education, land reform)	Covered all aspects of pacification (security, political, socio-economic)
DSAs disliked "unclear" rating criteria	DSAs preferred providing "facts", even though more detailed
Three-year data base	One-time discontinuity in trend lines; but new data base rested on more realistic foundation

provincial towns, etc.). Thus, it yielded information about the control of hamlets, control of populations in rural hamlets, and control of the total population in South Vietnam.

(U) Because all 18 indicators entered into a hamlet's overall rating (A through E), it is difficult to give a concise interpretation of what constituted an "A" or a "B" hamlet. There is no clear relationship between the previous GVN/U.S. categories and the HES classification, and this makes it difficult to link the two systems for an analysis of trends. For a broad comparison, the sum of nonhamlet population and the populations in A, B, and C hamlets seemed to be roughly equivalent to the GVN/U.S. "Secure" category; the D and E hamlet populations seemed equivalent to "Contested"; and VC was equivalent to "VC/NVA-Controlled."

(U) The composite HES scores were weighted more toward social and economic development than the criteria for the 1964-67 GVN/U.S. reports, and they gave a better measure of permanent pacification progress, as opposed to increased security protection. The latter, of course, can be examined separately in the HES, as can

many other questions. For example, the August 1967 HES score on the nine security indicators alone included 2 percent more of the South Vietnamese population in the A-B-C hamlet grouping than did the overall HES scores (that is, security ratings were slightly higher than development scores).<sup>(3)</sup>

(U) The first version of HES remained in use until January 1970, when a complete revision was adopted. Seeing shortcomings in the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), CORDS undertook a two-year reassessment of it, with professional consultant advice, and implemented a carefully revised system, called HES/70, in January 1970. HES/70 attempted to overcome the known biases that had developed in three years of HES reporting. It asked U.S. district senior advisors (DSA's) to supply facts, not subjective judgments, and it applied expert weighting criteria uniformly throughout the country to develop the composite HES/70 hamlet and village scores. Table 76 shows the differences between HES and HES/70.

(U) To obtain A, B, C, D, E, and VC ratings comparable to those in HES, HES/70 used a uniform, but complex, weighting scheme built upon



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TABLE 77. *Some 4.2 million people entered the secure category. (Table unclassified.)*

Degree of Military Security	1964 Dec	1965 Jun	1965 Dec	1966 Jun	1966 Dec	1967 <u>a/</u> Jun	1964-67 Change
POPULATION (In Millions)							
Secure <u>b/</u>	6.8	7.7	9.0	9.5	10.3	11.0	4.2
Contested	6.0	4.9	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.8	-2.2
VC Control <u>c/</u>	3.3	3.7	3.5	3.4	2.8	2.4	-.9
Total	16.1	16.3	16.5	16.7	17.0	17.2	1.1

BUT GAINS IN TERRITORY DID NOT EXPLAIN THE INCREASE

HAMLETS <u>d/</u> (In Thousands)							
Secure <u>b/</u>		3.5	4.2	4.2	4.7	4.7	1.2
Contested		4.5	3.6	3.6	3.7	4.1	-.8
VC Control <u>c/</u>		3.9	4.1	4.1	3.5	3.1	-.4
Total		11.9	11.9	11.9	11.9	11.9	0

Source: "Population Security Statistics," Southeast Asia Analysis Report, October 1967, p.22.

a/ The GVN/US system continued during the first six months of HES reporting (January-June 1967)

b/ Population or hamlets in areas reportedly under allied military protection and subject to at least some degree of continuing GVN administration.

c/ Population or hamlets reportedly in areas over which GVN exercised no effective control.

d/ Separate accounting for hamlets did not start until April 1965.

expert judgments of 18 different aspects of pacification. The experts' judgments were converted to A, B, C, D, E, and VC scores by a standard mathematical technique called Bayesian probability analysis. The HES/70 reports for the testing period of July-December 1969 showed about 1 percent less A-B population and 4 to 6 percent less A-B-C population than the old HES showed for the same period, and they registered less sensitivity to changes in GVN pacification goals. The difference suggests that HES/70 was more conservative than the old HES.

(U) In January 1971, CORDS changed the scoring system and called it HES/71, to give greater weight to political factors (VC/NVA infrastructure, terrorism, etc.) in describing security. The HES/71 was still in use at the end of 1972, and the system was gradually turned over to the Vietnamese before the U.S. forces completed their withdrawal.

By the end of 1972, eighty percent of all HES/71 reporting was being done by the South Vietnamese personnel themselves.

(U) The detailed questions and observations contained in the Hamlet Evaluation System (particularly HES/70) can be used to analyze many dimensions of the situation in South Vietnam. For example, HES/70 contained data about the VC/NVA infrastructure, land reform, economics, VC/NVA forces and actions, politics, and health care, to name a few topics. In the diversity of its components, the HES is similar to the PAAS (Pacification Attitude Analysis System), and the data are used in other chapters in the same manner as the PAAS data are used.\* For example, the land reform analysis (Chapter XIX) contains data

\*See Chapter XV for a full discussion and analysis of results from the PAAS.



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from the HES and PAAS, as well as from the Land-to-the-Tiller Program.

(U) The HES data are useful in another way, because they constitute the only record in South Vietnam of where the population is located. The locations are marked by UTM map coordinates, which can be compared with similar location data in other computer files to judge the relationship of a given activity to the population. This technique was used to match air strikes to civilian population in the analysis of civilian casualties (Chapter XII) and to match the spraying operations to the population in the herbicides analysis (Chapter VIII).

(U) Finally, the HES data base may be the most complete, systematic record of rural security and development in a less-developed country that exists anywhere, despite problems with the reporting of the development indicators (discussed below).

### THE TRENDS

#### GVN/U.S. SYSTEM

(U) The trends portrayed by the GVN/U.S. system appear in Table 77. The raw data are adjusted retrospectively to compensate for changes to the system during 1964-66. Tests of the assumptions that went into the adjustments indicate that the trends shown in the table constitute an accurate portrayal of the results from the system, although the accuracy of each figure is not precise.\*

(U) *The retrospective estimate suggests an increase of 4.2 million people in the "Secure" category between December 1964 and June 1967 (2½ years) and a reduction of about 900,000 in the number of people under "VC Control." In terms of percentages, the "Secure" population increased from 42 percent to 64 percent of the total.*

(U) The gains appear to be significant ones for the GVN, but Table 77 suggests that much of the increase resulted from the movement of people into GVN secure areas instead of expansion of territory (hamlets) protected by Allied military forces. Take the period from December 1965 to June 1967, for example, when the "Secure" population increased by 2 million. There were about 1.2

million officially recorded refugees during the period, which may account for 60 percent of the increase.† Natural population growth (at least 2.5 percent per year) would account for another 0.3 million (15 percent) of the increase.(5)

(U) Other factors could account for the remainder: extension of Allied protection; job seekers moving to the cities; "unofficial" refugees; and over-optimistic evaluation of programs. The hamlet data suggest that the extension of Allied protection is probably the main factor. About 500 hamlets were added to the secure category, and the average population per hamlet, countrywide, was about 1,000 at that time, so this would yield the 500,000 people needed to complete the 2 million gain.(5) This is not to say that the gain occurred precisely this way, but simply to indicate the kinds of factors at work, which in turn suggest that the gain may be reasonably valid.

(U) Intelligence reports and captured VC/NVA documents lent some credence to the trend in the Viet Cong's loss of control shown in Table 77, but they also suggest that the VC-control figures were too low. For example, a captured document of early 1966 stated that 5 million people lived in "liberated" (Viet Cong) areas and 9 million resided in government-held areas.‡ The retrospective estimate for December 1965 showed the same 9 million in the GVN-secure category, but only 3.6 million in the VC-controlled category, a shortfall of 1.4 million.

(U) The method of reporting also suggests that the population in VC/NVA-controlled areas was understated, because the pre-1967 GVN/U.S. system counted only the hamlets "planned for pacification." It ignored hamlets not in the pacification plan, most of which were probably VC/NVA hamlets. Table 77 shows 11,900 hamlets, but the HES system, which attempted to count *all* hamlets, counted about 12,600 of them and, for administrative purposes other than planning, the GVN counted some 13,000 plus.(6)

(U) The same 1966 captured document lamented the loss of a million people from the countryside into government-controlled urban areas as a

†Although up to half of them may have returned home after the winter-spring fighting subsided.

‡Five million in rural areas, and four million in cities and towns; see Ref. 5.

\*For a full account of the changes and assumptions made, see Ref. 4.



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TABLE 78. *Some 8.2 million people became "secure" between 1967 and 1972. (Table classified Confidential.)*

COUNTRYWIDE POPULATION (In millions end of year)	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1967-72 Change
Secure (A&B)	7.2	8.2	12.5	13.4	15.8	15.4	8.2
(C) Relatively Secure (C)	4.3	5.2	3.8	3.5	2.3	2.6	-1.7
Contested (D&E)	2.7	1.9	.8	.9	.6	1.0	-1.7
VC/NVA Control	2.9	2.2	.4	-	-	.2	-2.7
SVN Total	17.2	17.5	17.6	17.9	18.7	19.3	2.1

THIS RAISED THE PERCENTAGE OF "SECURE" FROM 42 TO 80 PERCENT

% of SVN POPULATION							
Secure (A&B)	42	47	71	75	84	80	38
(C) Relatively Secure	25	30	21	20	13	14	-11
Contested (D&E)	16	11	5	5	3	5	-11
VC/NVA Control	17	12	2	0	0	1	-16

Source: Hamlet Evaluation System Computer Tapes 1967-1972.

All figures are based on total HES scores, which include the security, political, and socio-economic dimensions.

Total includes population in unevaluated hamlets, which is not shown in the table, so some of the columns do not add precisely to the totals.

The table includes the urban population, which means that the C-D-E-VC population is mostly concentrated in the rural areas.

result of the presence of U.S. troops. The estimates in Table 77 show a loss of only 200,000 in Viet Cong control between June (arrival of U.S. combat troops) and December 1965. But the contested category dropped by 900,000 during the same period, and this may account for the rest of the "million" to which the document referred.

(U) Another captured document, dated Oct. 30, 1966, indicated that Allied operations and programs produced "some relatively significant results" in the form of 400 additional GVN hamlets "built" and 400,000 people brought under GVN control. Other documents referred to a loss of VC/NVA influence and control over the rural population and described the declines in VC/NVA food production, tax revenues, and manpower as a result of shrinkage in its population base.<sup>(7)</sup>

(U) The trends shown in Table 77 are also consistent with results of the September 1967 presidential election in South Vietnam. About 5.9 million voters were registered for that election, more than one-half of the secure population of June 1967. This was a gain of 600,000 over the number of registered voters a year earlier.<sup>(8)</sup> The estimates in Table 77 show an increase in the secure population of 1.5 million over the comparable period (June 1966 to June 1967), of whom approximately one-half would be eligible to vote. Details are not available to verify that both gains occurred in the same group of population, but at least the trends moved in the same direction.

(U) In summary, then, the figures in Table 77, captured VC/NVA documents, and the voter registration statistics all show the same trends. While the evidence is by no means conclusive, it does suggest

TABLE 79. Military Region 4 had the largest gains. (Table unclassified.)

SECURE POPULATION IN THE MILITARY REGIONS <sup>a/</sup> (In Millions- End of Year)	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Change 1967-1972
MR 1	1.2	1.2	1.8	2.4	2.7	2.4	1.2
MR 2	1.2	1.4	2.1	2.0	2.4	2.4	1.2
MR 3	3.0	3.3	4.8	4.7	5.2	5.2	2.2
MR 4	1.8	2.3	3.8	4.3	5.5	5.4	3.6

BUT MILITARY REGION 3 WAS THE MOST SECURE

(% OF POPULATION SECURE IN EACH MR) <sup>a/</sup>	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	
MR 1	36	41	61	76	84	73	37
MR 2	43	47	67	63	72	70	27
MR 3	57	59	86	89	95	91	34
MR 4	31	38	64	68	82	78	47

Source: HES Computer Tapes 1967-72.  
<sup>a/</sup> All figures are based on total HES scores, which include the security, political, and socio-economic dimensions.

that the portrayal of the situation in Table 77 is probably not too far wrong, except that the truly "Secure" population is probably overstated and more people and hamlets were almost certainly under VC/NVA control than the table shows. But the fundamental trends appear sound, and they support the notion of a gain of 4 million people in the "Secure" category between December 1964 and June 1967.

TRENDS FROM THE HAMLET EVALUATION SYSTEM (HES)

- (U) The major trends from the Hamlet Evaluation System appear in Table 78, which suggests that:
- There were 8.2 million people made "secure" during the five years between December 1967 and December 1972. This raised the proportion in this category to 80 percent of the total population in South Vietnam.
  - The losses in the Tet offensive were recovered by the end of 1968. Indeed, gains were made, with 1 million people added to the secure category by year's end.
  - The pacification effort really produced results in 1969, when 4.3 million people were added to the secure category. The contested and VC/NVA-controlled populations fell below all previous levels.
  - The VC/NVA offensive in 1972 eroded the gains, but not in any major way for the country as a whole.

(U) Table 79 shows the HES trends for each of the

TABLE 80. The South Vietnamese gained some control over 11 million people. (Table unclassified.)

	1964	1967	1972
"SECURE" POPULATION <sup>a/</sup> (In Millions)	6.8	11.5	18.0
% of Total	42	67	93
Total Population (In Millions)	16.1	17.2	19.3

<sup>a/</sup> "Secure" category from GVN/U.S. system for 1964; A+B+C HES population (total scores) for 1967 and 1972.

four military regions in two ways: (1) in terms of population in the secure category and (2) in terms of the *percentage of each region's population* in that category. In terms of secure population, Military Region 4 gained the most. This also was the area where CORDS put greatest pacification emphasis. Military Regions 3 and 4 accounted for 70 percent of the countrywide gain. All of the regions except Military Region 1 showed gains in 1968 despite the Tet offensive, and Military Region 1 recovered its losses. In 1969, all four regions showed major gains. And in the 1972 offensive, Military Regions 1 and 4 lost ground, but the other two did not.

(U) In terms of percentages, Military Region 3 (which includes Saigon) was the most secure throughout the five-year period, and it pulled the countrywide average up to 80 percent in 1972. Military Region 4 started below the others in 1967, but surpassed the two northern regions by the end of 1972. In percentage terms, all four regions showed losses as a result of the 1972 offensive, with Military Region 1 falling the most.\*

(U) Table 80 shows what happens when a time series is constructed joining the GVN/U.S. system and the results of the HES. The linkage is crude, and it simply assumes that the HES A-B-C total was roughly equivalent to the GVN/U.S. "Secure" population, which was the case in January 1967, when the systems were operating side by side. The results are not precise, but they do suggest significant Allied progress between December 1964 and December 1972.

\*Population in the secure category in Military Regions 2 and 3 remained constant, but the total population in each military region increased during the year; hence, the percentage declines.



(U) *The table indicates that the Government of South Vietnam gained some sort of control over more than 11 million people. In percentage terms, the gain is from 42 percent of the total population in 1964 to 93 percent in 1972. The qualitative improvement doesn't show in the table, but from Table 78 it can be determined that 15.4 million of the 1972 figure represented population in the A-B categories, as opposed to only 7.2 million of the 1967 figure. The results are impressive.*

## RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE HES TRENDS

(U) A key question at this point is concerned with the reliability and validity of the HES results. It has already been suggested that the GVN/U.S. system results were not too bad. How good—or bad—was the HES? Did it reflect what was actually happening? As used here, validity is the extent to which indicators actually measure the phenomena under investigation. Did the HES actually measure the status of population security? Reliability refers to the consistency in reporting (or coding) by one reporter (coder) over a period of time or among several reporters (or coders) at one point in time.

(U) The analysis of HES reliability and validity proceeds in three stages and examines (1) some formal studies conducted to check the validity of the HES, particularly in its first stages from 1967 through 1969, (2) what rigorous analyses of the HES details revealed, and (3) what streams of evidence from other reporting systems, independent of HES, implied about the validity of HES trends.

### FORMAL STUDIES

(U) When the HES was adopted, considerable concern was expressed about the validity of the system, particularly in its early stages of development, and several studies to identify problems in the HES and check its validity were undertaken. Their main results are summarized below.

(U) In December 1967, Department of Defense analysts noted the factors that combined to make HES reporting difficult.<sup>(9)</sup> Only a few of the 18 indicators could be rated on the basis of direct observation of a clear-cut condition. (HES/70 solved much of this problem.) Much of the HES information could be obtained only from the

Vietnamese, and surveys indicated that U.S. advisors relied on their Vietnamese counterparts for at least half of the raw data they were using to answer the HES questions. Finally, most advisors could not visit all of their hamlets during any one month.

(U) Despite these difficulties, the analysts found that the HES results correlated well with non-HES data, such as VC/NVA-initiated incidents. For example, antiaircraft fire tended to occur over VC/NVA-controlled hamlets, and incidents around "Secure" (A or B) hamlets tended to be characterized by terror. The analysts also found by statistical analysis of the April 1967 HES reports that the raters were not mechanically grading all of the indicators according to a single criterion. The wide variety of hamlet characteristics was reflected in the range of grades for each hamlet.

(U) Another early study was performed in Washington by the Institute for Defense Analyses,<sup>(10)</sup> and this developed a three-part methodology to check the HES results. One part compared map plots of HES data with map plots of VC/NVA military actions, while the second part showed combinations of various levels of security and development factors. The third step assigned VC/NVA military incidents to the closest hamlet by matching the geographical coordinates of the incident and the hamlet.

(U) The methodology was applied to three sample districts, with use of the HES data for January 1967 through May 1967, the earliest stage of the HES operation. Most of the conclusions dealt with methodological problems, but one of them stated:

Application of the methodology to the developing HES data gave many indications that the HES will provide meaningful data when the system is fully in operation.

and

. . . the sample data studied were found to be very compatible within themselves and with other data.<sup>(11)</sup>

(U) The next study was a major effort conducted in Vietnam by the Simulmatics Corporation for the U.S. Army Concept Team in Vietnam.<sup>(12)</sup> The U.S.-Vietnamese study team conducted interviews, researched records, and went into the field to develop its conclusions. Basically, the team compared the advisor's inputs to the HES



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with the opinions of other observers, such as the people in the hamlet, the hamlet chief, and the team members themselves, after direct observation of the hamlet being studied. The major conclusions were: <sup>(13)</sup>

The results of this study indicate that the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) as a total system is basically sound as a reporting device for the entire country and for political divisions down to the district level, and should be continued. A distinction is made, however, between security and development factors . . . HES is a reasonably reliable method of estimating security trends. The interjudge reliability of the development factors is less clear.

Aggregate data on a hamlet appear to be sufficiently reliable for evaluation of the progress of pacification within districts. Ratings of some specific indicators in a hamlet, however, appear questionable if used to evaluate individual hamlets.

Our data suggest that there is a relationship between an advisor's knowledge of Vietnamese and the reliability of his overall ratings. The presence of a civilian advisor in a district was also found to be related to reliable overall ratings.

The evidence indicates that advisors are not inflating their ratings. There is no evidence that indicates an upward bias to advisors' ratings over the length of their tours. There is evidence that advisors tend to make the largest number of rating changes at the beginning and the middle of their tours.

(U) A third study, in the form of an informal working paper in November 1969, attempted to establish the statistical characteristics of the HES data. It found that the average hamlet security scores represented a normal distribution of data, which meant that approximately 68 percent of the time the reported score would be within 0.2 point of the real score (five-point scoring scale) and 95 percent of the time it would be within 0.4 of the real score. For example, if the composite hamlet score was reported as 3.7, then the actual score would be between 3.3 and 4.1 ninety-five percent of the time.

(U) From these types of studies, and working with the data from the system, the following consensus developed among HES analysts:

- Changes in the HES security scores were sensitive enough to identify progress or regression in areas over time.

- HES measurements were not precise enough to make point estimates—that is, to measure precisely the position along a scale between “least secure” and “most secure.” The precision, naturally, increased for higher levels of aggregation. At lower levels (village, district, province) it was generally agreed to be on the order of plus-or-minus one letter grade.
- Comparisons among different geographic areas in South Vietnam at a single point in time may be of questionable reliability, because of wide differences in the characteristics of various areas.

### ANALYSIS OF HES DETAILS

(U) Considerable insight into the reliability and meaning of the HES trends can be gained from analyzing the details reported in the HES. Several examples of such analysis are presented here. The first describes the development of an indicator of rural security and its trends. The rest present trends resulting from some of the detailed questions asked by the HES about each hamlet or village.

(U) *Rural Control Indicator.* Of course, the HES trends presented above included people living in cities in the secure population. They were reasonably secure to begin with; and with few exceptions, they remained so throughout the period. The emphasis of the pacification effort was on the rural countryside, and the situation there was masked by the presence of the urban population in the estimates. (CORDS used *rural HES data alone* for its own management analyses.)\* Moreover, the HES data shown so far included many items besides security factors, because many of the HES questions related to the socio-economic and political situations.

(U) To overcome these problems, an indicator of rural control was developed out of HES data. It used 10 carefully selected HES questions and began with the assumption that a primary objective of both sides in the Vietnam War was to achieve *control* of the people and resources of the countryside. The rural control indicator assigned a hamlet to the side which had enough military and political strength to administer the hamlet

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\*One of the virtues of HES was that it allowed easy computer separation of such data elements.



TABLE 81. South Vietnamese Government control showed large gains in the rural areas during 1970. (Table unclassified.)

SOUTH VIET-NAM				
Rural Control Indicator	Dec 1969	Dec 1970	Dec 1971	Dec 1972
GVN Control	48%	67%	76%	68%
Contested	46%	31%	23%	29%
VC/NVA Control	6%	2%	1%	3%
Rural Population (In Millions)	10.5	11.1	11.8	11.6

effectively, while preventing the other side from doing so. Doubtful cases were assigned to a "neither side controls" category. The indicator made the following assumptions:

- The GVN required *both* military strength (local security forces) *and* political and administrative organization (hamlet chief, village council, administrative personnel) to achieve control over a hamlet. However, a single indicator of significant VC/NVA presence (armed enemy forces, regular covert VCI activity, significant access at night) could *veto* GVN control.
- The VC/NVA, on the other hand, could achieve control with a strong political organization alone (the VC/NVA infrastructure). The GVN could *veto* VC/NVA control with a strong military or political/administrative presence.
- The GVN could achieve control only when full *local* security was provided. When a hamlet had to rely primarily on external forces for defense, a key element of lasting control—local participation—was considered lost. External forces could not serve as a proxy for GVN military strength in the hamlet.

(U) Table 81 shows the results for 1969 through 1972. Comparing them with the results in Table 78 shows that the rural control indicator portrays a somewhat different rural picture than the HES total scores for the entire country:

- In December 1969, the total HES scores suggest that 71 percent of the total population was "secure." However, only 48 percent of the *rural* population was under South Vietnamese "control." In 1972, the figures were 80 percent and 68 percent. (The HES A-B security scores for *rural population alone*

TABLE 82. What do detailed questions from HES/70 say about VC/NVA control? (Table unclassified.)

POPULATION (000) UNDER VC/NVA CONTROL	Dec 1969	Dec 1970	Dec 1971	Dec 1972
HES/70 (Total Scores)	412	38	7	220
Rural Control Indicator	590	233	153	370
POPULATION (000) IN HAMLETS WHERE: a/				
1. VC/NVA Forces Physically Control	412	38	7	220
2. VC/NVA Military Forces are Regularly Present	537	191	106	384
3. The VC/NVA Infrastructure is the Primary Authority b/	594	219	133	339
4. The GVN Hamlet Chief is not Regularly Present	975	796	284	316

- a/ The four factors are based on the following HES/70 questions:  
(1) HMB-1; (2) HMB-4; (3) HQB-1; (4) HQE-2. An attempt to add the figures shown will result in an unknown degree of double counting.
- b/ This judgement is highly subjective and may be of questionable validity.

indicated that 55 percent of the rural population had A-B security ratings in December 1969, as opposed to a reading of 48 percent for rural control. The rural A-B ratings for HES showed the same trends as the rural security indicator, but usually they were eight to ten percentage points higher.)

- The total HES scores indicate that pacification progress was slow in 1970 (gain of four percentage points) after large gains in 1969, but the rural control indicator suggests that pacification really began to show results in the countryside during 1970 (gain of 19 percentage points).
- The impact of the 1972 offensive shows more clearly in the rural control indicator. Control by GVN slipped eight percentage points\* (as opposed to 4 percent for total HES scores), and control by the VC/NVA rose to 3 percent (as opposed to 0.2 percent).

(U) After all the calculations, assumptions, and effort that went into constructing the rural security indicator, it is interesting—and significant—to see that *both ways of measuring pacification progress show the same result between 1969 and 1972*. The HES total scores indicate that 2.9 million people were made secure during the period, while the rural control indicator suggests that 2.8 million

\*By July 1972 it had dropped to 62 percent, or 15 percentage points below the previous December (1971). The HES, as well as showing progress, rapidly showed the impact of VC/NVA offensives or other setbacks. Regressions showed up fairly clearly and were not masked to any significant extent.



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people were brought under control in the rural areas.

(U) *At the minimum, the data suggest that after 1969 GVN security for the population was really reaching out into the countryside, in contrast to earlier years, when much of the increase consisted of people moving from the countryside into the secure areas.* The statistics also suggest that one can gain almost as much insight into the rural situation by using the HES A-B scores for the rural population only as CORDS officials did. However, this analysis continues to use the control indicator to view results in the rural areas, because the rural indicator statistics happen to be readily available and the rural HES scores are not.

(U) *Individual HES Questions.* Table 82 compares answers to some of the individual HES/70 questions with the VC/NVA control data from the total scores and from the rural control indicator. The table gives some insight into what the indicators really mean. For example, a VC/NVA-controlled hamlet, defined by the total HES scores, simply is one in which the VC/NVA forces physically control the hamlet. The VC/NVA military forces could be present in the hamlet regularly, or the VC/NVA infrastructure could reportedly be the primary authority in the hamlet, but the HES/70 total score would not place it in the VC/NVA control category. This indicates what the D and E categories must be like.

### DO TRENDS REPORTED FROM OTHER SOURCES AGREE WITH HES TRENDS?

(U) Another way to add perspective to the validity of HES results is to examine the security situation as reported independently of HES. Casualty data, public-attitude surveys, and reports of the security conditions of roads and waterways furnish data for crude comparison.

(U) Casualties among Allied forces and favorable HES results tend to move in opposite directions. During 1969 through 1971, the Allied casualties declined each year and HES security ratings rose. In 1972, the casualties rose with the VC/NVA offensive, and HES showed a loss of security for the population. This is a crude comparison, but it does suggest that HES results moved with the intensity of the war. Whether things were going poorly or well for the Allies, HES showed it.

(U) The public attitude surveys suggest that, on average, the hamlet residents felt less secure than the HES ratings showed. In one comparison, 44 percent of the hamlet residents described their hamlets as being less secure than the HES rating indicated; 54 percent of the respondents generally agreed with the HES description of their hamlet, and 2 percent said security was better. The Simulmatics Corporation study of HES validity, employing U.S. researchers in the field, found the same phenomenon. Hamlet residents were more conservative in their assessments than were the independent researchers, and the latter implied that the results were as much in the eyes of hamlet residents as in the facts of the situation. Perhaps the results of the attitude survey have the same characteristic.

(U) The data reporting the security status of essential roads and waterways support the HES population security trends in general. There are problems with the time series, but in December 1971, eighty percent of the essential roads and 75 percent of the essential waterways were considered safe. In addition, polls in the summer of 1972 suggested that 75 percent of the rural population had no difficulty getting themselves or their produce to market. In this case, the polls were more optimistic than the HES data, which indicated that 70 percent of the rural population was free of VC/NVA taxation on produce moving to and from their hamlets. Thus, the progress in making roads and waterways safe for travel was significant. All three sets of data support the assertion that conditions were reasonably good by the end of 1971 and held fairly well in 1972.

(U) Comments of U.S. advisors and other U.S. personnel returning to the United States in 1971 and 1972 consistently supported the notion that considerable progress had been made in making roads safe. Often, the returning person, whose experience in Vietnam was normally limited to one year, was unaware of the significance of his remarks until another person who had served in the same area a few years before expressed astonishment at the conditions being described. The surprise was usually expressed in response to a casual comment from the new arrival that he had taken a jeep and driven from point A to point B by himself. The old timer would sputter,

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"It used to take a battalion to travel on that road." Such exchanges were frequent.

### CONCLUSION

(U) The data all combine to suggest that it is possible to gain some notion of how secure or how well under control the population is, but it all depends upon how security and control are defined and on what universe is being measured (for example, urban or rural). In the absence of an absolute criterion of truth, the data can be interpreted in many ways and at various levels of aggregation. Indeed, this chapter has done so and has shown the futility of assuming that the data represent a completely accurate statement at any point in time.

(U) The question of validity remains. Were the HES reports reasonably valid? Did they reflect reliably the changing situation in South Vietnam, and particularly in the rural areas? The answer to both questions is yes. The trends seem reasonable. Detailed analysis of the HES data confirms them, and so do independent reporting systems outside of the HES.

(U) Obviously, great progress was made in gaining influence and control of the South Vietnamese countryside. It is apparent that the process of

providing GVN security for the population, as measured by the HES results and the other data presented here, took hold gradually and made great strides in 1969 and 1970. Most of those gains held through the intense fighting of 1972, although significant regressions were clearly evident in the areas of most intense combat. Most of the credit for this probably belongs to the pacification program. It undoubtedly benefited from RVNAF regular forces, who furnished a critical shield for the program, but it seems clear that without a pacification program the gains would not have been anywhere near as great. After years of criticism of the HES results, it is interesting to read (in 1974) accounts of the situation in South Vietnam which cite the strong GVN influence and control of the countryside.

(U) The security improvement in the countryside permitted other important developments. Food production rose dramatically, reducing South Vietnam's reliance on rice imports and bringing new prosperity to the farmers. The improved security also permitted the massive 1970-73 land reform effort, which distributed 2.5 million acres of land to 800,000 tenant farmer families (see Chapter XIX). As a result, the farm tenancy rate dropped from 60 percent of all cropland to 10 percent of it.



## Chapter XIV

### How Well Did the Territorial Forces Perform?

(U) Chapter VII, in discussing the improvement of RVNAF effectiveness, suggests that forces from outside of the country seldom win a war without fronts, and that the capabilities of the indigenous forces are critical to the outcome. Chapter VII deals mostly with improving the regular forces of RVNAF—the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In contrast, this chapter discusses the role and performance of the South Vietnamese territorial forces, who were badly neglected until 1967, when CORDS took over the U.S. advisory effort and support to them.

(U) The territorial forces were extremely important to the Allied war effort in Vietnam. The objective in any war without fronts is to gain the support of the population, with particular emphasis on the rural population. The territorial forces were the troops closest to the population, and they had the primary mission of protecting the people from the attacks and terrorism of the Communists. In a war without fronts, action can occur throughout the country, with forces of both sides operating in the same areas for years at a time. The permanent resident forces in the contested areas of South Vietnam were the territorial forces on each side—the VC/NVA guerrillas, local forces, and cadre versus the GVN territorial forces and cadre. The outcome of the struggle to gain the support of the rural population depended in large part on the effectiveness of these respective forces.

(U) The forces addressed here were generally under the command of pacification authorities, somewhat separated from the formal chain of

command for the South Vietnamese regular forces. Their mission was to defend the population and to bring the people over to the GVN, behind the security shield furnished by the regular forces.

#### WHO WERE THEY?

(U) Five types of forces are considered:

- RF (Regular Forces), who basically operated as infantry companies within a district or province.
- PF (Popular Forces), who were local platoons usually assigned to a specific village or other local security task.
- NP (National Police), who operated in the cities and towns of South Vietnam and, later, in most of the villages.
- RD (Revolutionary Development) and Truong Son Cadre, who went into villages and hamlets after a modicum of security had been established to bring GVN programs to the people and organize support for the government. The RD Cadre operated in Vietnamese hamlets and the Truong Son Cadre in Montagnard villages.
- PSDF (People's Self Defense Forces), who were village and hamlet militia, lightly armed and trained to resist small VC/NVA incursions into their hamlets.

Table 83 displays their personnel strengths. The People's Self Defense Forces (PSDF) are not included in the total, because they were not full-time troops paid by the GVN, and also because the meaning of the data is in considerable doubt (see discussion of the PSDF later in this chapter).



TABLE 83. *South Vietnamese pacification forces; end-of-year strength in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
Regional Forces (RF) <sup>a/</sup>	132	150	151	220	261	283	284	301
Popular Forces (PF) <sup>a/</sup>	136	150	149	172	214	251	248	219
Subtotal	268	300	300	392	475	534	532	520
National Police <sup>a/</sup>	52	58	74	79	85	88	114	121
Revolutionary Development Cadre <sup>a/</sup>	--	27 <sup>f/</sup>	37	46	44	37	28	21
Truong Son Cadre	--	6 <sup>f/</sup>	7	7	7	7	5	2
Total GVN Forces	320	391	418	524	611	666	679	664
People's Self Defense Forces <sup>b/</sup>				1481 <sup>c/</sup>	3219	3489 <sup>d/</sup>	4429	3829 <sup>e/</sup>

- <sup>a/</sup> Source: Table 3, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Department of Defense, OASD (Comptroller), February 14, 1973.
- <sup>b/</sup> Source: Army Activities Report: Southeast Asia (U), Final Issue (CSDCS-74), December 20, 1972, pp. 45 and 50.
- <sup>c/</sup> June 1969 figure. No data for 1968.
- <sup>d/</sup> November 30, 1970 figure.
- <sup>e/</sup> September 30, 1972 figure.
- <sup>f/</sup> Source: "Revolutionary Development (RD) Personnel", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, July 1967, p. 32.

(U) The Regional and Popular Forces furnished the bulk of the full-time GVN territorial forces. The Regional Forces and the National Police grew throughout the period, while the Popular Forces and RD Cadre grew to a peak and then declined during the later years of the war.

(U) The basic mission of the territorial forces was to provide hamlet and village security. A series of questions in the HES (Hamlet Evaluation System)

TABLE 84. *Which force is primarily responsible for the security of this hamlet? (Percentage of South Vietnamese population.) (Table unclassified.)*

	1969	1970	1971	1972
	Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Regional Forces	16	12	8	7
Popular Forces	47	48	44	39
National Police	5	9	14	17
People's Self Defense Forces	24	29	33	35

Source: Hamlet Evaluation System Quarterly Question HQC 1: "Which of the following is primarily responsible for conducting military security operations, patrols, ambushes, listening posts, etc., in the immediate vicinity of this hamlet? (If more than one select the force making the largest contribution)". From unpublished computer printout.

shed some light on which forces were primarily responsible for security and on the tempo of activity in and around the hamlets.

(U) Popular Forces were considered to be the primary security forces for about 40 percent of the South Vietnamese population, and the People's Self Defense Forces covered another 30 percent, as shown in Table 84. The trends show increasing security roles for the National Police and PSDF, as the Regional and Popular Forces hamlet security roles declined late in the war

(U) The increasing security roles of the National Police and PSDF fit well with the results of Table 85, which show a growing percentage of the South Vietnamese population living in areas where GVN security operations were no longer necessary. The pattern reflects progress in establishing security in the countryside, which allowed the National Police and PSDF to take over much of the security function, freeing the Regional and Popular Forces for additional missions.



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TABLE 85. Do GVN local security forces conduct security operations ? (Percentage of South Vietnamese population.) (Table unclassified.)

	1969 Dec (%)	1970 Dec (%)	1971 Dec (%)	1972 Dec (%)
DURING THE DAY <sup>a/</sup>				
No	3	1	2	1
Yes	82	79	62	58
Not Needed (No Threat)	13	20	36	40
AT NIGHT <sup>b/</sup>				
No	3	1	2	2
Yes	93	93	83	78
Not Needed	2	6	15	19

<sup>a/</sup> Source: Hamlet Evaluation System Quarterly Question HQC-2: "During daylight hours, do friendly local security forces conduct necessary security operations along approaches to this hamlet? (e.g., patrols, ambushes, listening posts, check points, etc.)". From unpublished computer printout.

<sup>b/</sup> Source: HES Quarterly Question HQC-3: "During hours of darkness, do friendly local security forces conduct necessary security operations along approaches to this hamlet? (e.g., patrols, ambushes, listening posts, check points, etc.)". From unpublished computer printout.

TABLE 86. Have GVN forces from outside operated in this village during the month? (Percentage of South Vietnamese population.) (Table unclassified.)

	1969 Dec (%)	1970 Dec (%)	1971 Dec (%)	1972 Dec (%)
No	38	62	73	59
Yes	35	24	19	29
Yes - Contact with VC/NVA Force	24	14	8	11

Source: HES Monthly Question VMC-1: "Have friendly external forces (forces normally based outside the village) operated in this village during the month"? From unpublished computer printout.

(U) Table 86 further supports the notions of growing self-reliance and movement of the war away from populated areas. It suggests that outside GVN forces operated in the populated areas less and less and made fewer and fewer contacts there, until the VC/NVA offensive reversed the trend in 1972.

(U) Table 87 suggests that few of the local security forces made contact with the VC/NVA during the month. It also shows a declining trend in the population living where contacts occurred, until 1972.

## THE REGIONAL AND POPULAR FORCES WERE THE MOST COST EFFECTIVE MILITARY FORCES EMPLOYED ON THE ALLIED SIDE

### FORCES AND MISSIONS

(U) The Regional Forces and Popular Forces

TABLE 87. Have local security-force operations resulted in contact with VC/NVA forces during the month? (Percentages of South Vietnamese population.) (Table unclassified.)

	1969 Dec (%)	1970 Dec (%)	1971 Dec (%)	1972 Dec (%)
No	88	92	94	91
Yes, Once	6	5	4	5
Yes, More than once	4	3	2	3

Source: HES Monthly Question HMC-3, as stated above. From unpublished computer printout.

TABLE 88. Regional and Popular Forces increased by 73 percent; troop strength in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)

Military Region	1966 (U)	1967 (U)	1968 (U)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)	1972 (C)
MR 1	45	46	58	74	82	80	78
MR 2	72	74	95	110	119	121	116
MR 3	68	65	91	109	122	115	118
MR 4	115	115	148	182	211	216	208
SVN Total	300	300	392	475	534	532	520

Source: Table 106, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), pp. 1, 3, and 5.

TABLE 89. Regional Force companies doubled in five years. (Table classified Confidential.)

Regional Force Companies	1968 Jan (U)	1968 Dec (U)	1969 Dec (C)	1970 Dec (C)	1971 Dec (C)	1972 Dec (C)
MR 1	122	155	212	227	235	252
MR 2	242	293	359	411	412	427
MR 3	219	272	371	407	413	429
MR 4	312	399	529	627	616	715
SVN Total	895	1119	1471	1672	1676	1823

Source: CORDS, Territorial Forces Evaluation System (TFES). From unpublished computer printouts.

were the main territorial troops operating for the GVN in the countryside and, as already indicated in Chapter III, they received a small share of the resources devoted to the war. Both relied heavily (but not exclusively) on local recruiting and normally did not operate outside of their own provinces or districts, although some Regional Force troops fought outside of their provinces during the 1972 VC/NVA offensive, particularly in Military Region 4.



TABLE 90. *The Regional Forces build-up focused on hamlet-village security first, and then shifted to active operations. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1968	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	Jan	Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec	Jun
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
<u>Missions</u>						
Security:						
Hamlet-Village	319	348	626	560	513	395
Roads & Waterways	127	159	191	167	185	170
Other	<u>309</u>	<u>283</u>	<u>257</u>	<u>252</u>	<u>266</u>	<u>273</u>
Subtotal	755	790	1074	979	964	838
Active:						
Offensive Operations	55	182	280	206	374	448
Reaction Forces	28	57	62	70	130	206
Other	<u>57</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>417</u>	<u>208</u>	<u>177</u>
Subtotal	140	329	397	693	712	831
Total	895	1119	1471	1672	1676	1669

Source: MACV-CORDS, Territorial Forces Evaluation System. From unpublished computer printouts.

TABLE 91. *Popular Force platoons doubled by 1971 and then declined. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1968	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	Jan	Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
<u>Popular Force Platoons</u>						
MR 1	708	755	920	1115	1218	1209
MR 2	1055	1177	1311	1586	1843	1752
MR 3	739	851	1028	1194	1266	1304
MR 4	<u>1669</u>	<u>1948</u>	<u>2413</u>	<u>3327</u>	<u>3752</u>	<u>3208</u>
SVN Total	4171	4731	5672	7222	8079	7473

Source: MACV-CORDS, Territorial Forces Evaluation System (TFES). From unpublished computer printouts.

(U) Table 88 displays the combined RF-PF strength by military region in South Vietnam. Between 1966 and 1972, the forces grew by 73 percent, the increase being fairly uniform among the four military regions, whose gains ranged from 61 to 80 percent. Throughout the period, Military Region 1 had 15 percent of the forces, Military Region 2 had 23 percent, Military Region 3 had 23 percent, and Military Region 4 had about 39 percent. The distribution of forces changed very little, as the entire force structure grew from 300,000 troops in 1966 to 520,000 in 1972.

(U) Regional Forces operated in 100-man companies, usually within a single South Vietnamese province or district, and the number of Regional Forces companies doubled between January 1968 and December 1972, from 895 to 1823 (Table 89). Some of the companies were organized into bat-

TABLE 92. *The Popular Forces build-up focused on hamlet and village security. (Table classified Confidential.)*

	1968	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
	Jan	Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec	Jun
	(U)	(U)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)
<u>Missions</u>						
Security:						
Hamlet-Village	2714	3114	4079	3887	5181	4695
Roads and Waterways	517	579	548	674	945	1005
Other	<u>693</u>	<u>684</u>	<u>621</u>	<u>631</u>	<u>786</u>	<u>776</u>
Subtotal	3924	4377	5248	5192	6912	6476
Active:						
Offensive Operations	86	108	141	168	240	366
Reaction Forces	32	43	58	78	134	338
Other	<u>129</u>	<u>203</u>	<u>225</u>	<u>1784</u>	<u>793</u>	<u>692</u>
Subtotal	247	354	424	2030	1167	1396
Total	4171	4731	5672	7222	8079	7872

Source: MACV-CORDS, Territorial Forces Evaluation System. From unpublished computer printouts.

talions late in the period, but the company remained the basic operating unit and the discussion here focuses on that unit.

(U) The buildup of Regional Forces shows up primarily as additional units assigned to hamlet and village security until December 1969, although companies on offensive missions increased sharply, too. After 1969, as the need to use Regional and Popular Forces for hamlet-village security missions declined, they shifted to local offensive operations; and in December 1969, forty-three percent of the companies were on hamlet-village security missions. This dropped to 24 percent 2½ years later, as the percentage of units on active missions increased from 27 to 50 percent (see Table 90).

(U) The RF patterns in the four military regions were similar to the countrywide pattern, with the data showing a pervasive buildup of security forces, which then shifted to more active operations as security in the rural areas improved. The period began with 755 RF companies on security missions, compared to 140 on active missions, and it ended with approximately 830 companies assigned to each mission.

(U) The Popular Force platoons, 30-man units that operated in specific villages or hamlets,



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TABLE 93. *It was more dangerous to serve with the Regional and Popular Forces than with the regular forces. (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>
Regional and Popular Forces:					
As a % of RVNAF Forces <sup>a/</sup>	47	48	49	51	51
As a % of RVNAF Combat Deaths <sup>b/</sup>	52	47	54	59	60
RF/PF Combat Deaths Per 1000 RF/PF Personnel Strength <sup>c/</sup>	22	29	22	22	25
Regular Force Combat Deaths per 1000 Regular Personnel Strength <sup>c/</sup>	18	30	17	16	17

- a/ Source: Derived from Table 3, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), February 14, 1973.
- b/ Source: Derived from Table 53, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), March 18, 1971, and February 16, 1972, pp. 1-5.
- c/ Source: Derived from Tables 3 and 53 noted in a/ and b/ above.

TABLE 94. *The Regional and Popular Forces took the brunt of the VC/NVA-initiated action. (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>
RF/PF % of RVNAF Killed By VC/NVA Initiated actions	60%	55%	55%	66%	65%	45%

Source: Unpublished SEAPRS Computer File Printout.

doubled between January 1968 and December 1971 and then decreased by 606 platoons, for a net growth of 80 percent (Table 91). The number of PF platoons went from approximately 4,200 to 8,100 and then dropped to about 7,500, for a net gain of approximately 3,300 platoons.

(U) As expected, the Popular Forces buildup focused on security missions, although the platoons on active missions increased, too. Platoons on hamlet-village security missions increased from 2,714 in January 1968 to 5,181 in December 1971, and then declined. In December 1969, hamlet-village security missions accounted for 72 percent of the platoons. By June 1972, this had declined to 60 percent. In the same period, platoons on active missions increased from 7 to 18 percent. Table 92 displays the data. As with the Regional Forces,

the military regions reflect the countrywide pattern in varying degrees, indicating similar movement throughout South Vietnam.

(U) The RF/PF buildups and their gradual shift to more active missions accord well with the HES results, which show the National Police and the People's Self Defense Forces taking more of the responsibility for hamlet security as time passes. The HES data also reflect the sharp decrease in RF responsibility for hamlet security, as well as the much slower decline in the PF role.

COMBAT PERFORMANCE OF THE REGIONAL AND POPULAR FORCES

(U) The Regional and Popular Forces took the brunt of the war, more than any other South Vietnamese armed force. They had a higher pro-



TABLE 95. *The Regional and Popular Forces accounted for about 30 percent of the VC/NVA killed by the RVNAF. (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>
% of VC/NVA Combat Deaths Inflicted by RF/PF <u>a/</u>	N/A	23% <sup>b/</sup>	30%	30%	33%	28%

a/ MACV Measurements of Progress Report, April 1968 through December 1972.

b/ April through December.

portion of combat deaths than the regulars and were the prime targets of VC/NVA attacks until 1972

(U) The RF/PF share of combat deaths was higher than their percentage in the RVNAF force composition. In 1971, for example, the RF/PF accounted for 51 percent of the total forces, but 60 percent of the combat deaths, and this figure probably is conservative.\* The intensity figures—combat deaths per 1,000 personnel strength—show the same relationship. In every year except 1968, the chances of getting killed in the RF/PF were higher than in the regular forces (Table 93). Moreover, the gap between the RF/PF and the regulars widened each year from 1969 through 1971; relative to the regular forces, service in the RF/PF got more dangerous each year. One reason for the widening gap between the regular and territorial forces was that the territorial forces accounted for an increasing proportion of the RVNAF killed in VC/NVA attacks. They suffered 55 to 66 percent of all RVNAF deaths from such causes in every year except 1972 (Table 94).

(U) The question on the other side of the coin is, to what extent did the RF/PF inflict casualties on the VC/NVA forces? Table 95 has the answer. The data suggest that the RF/PF accounted for about 30 percent of the VC/NVA combat deaths inflicted by RVNAF forces, although this figure, too, may be conservative.† In any case, it is clear that the territorial forces inflicted a lower per-

centage of VC/NVA casualties than they took (33 percent inflicted versus 60 percent taken in 1971).

(U) Several factors help to explain the discrepancy. First, the territorial forces operated in the rural areas, where the VC/NVA forces found them more readily available, softer targets than the regular forces. The RF/PF bore the brunt of VC/NVA offensive actions, and the VC/NVA enjoyed exceptionally favorable kill ratios in such actions. At one point, actions initiated by the VC/NVA inflicted 28 percent of the total Allied combat deaths, while costing them only 5 percent of theirs.<sup>(14)</sup> The RF/PF suffered accordingly.

(U) Second, RF/PF fights with the VC/NVA tended to occur at night, often unexpectedly and far from combat support. Data from Military Region 3 for the period from October 1966 to March 1967 suggest that, when attacked, RF/PF troops received outside support in only 45 percent of the actions and ground reinforcements arrived only 11 percent of the time. The other side of the picture is even worse. When their offensive operations contacted the VC/NVA, the territorials received outside help in only 17 percent of the Military Region 3 actions and ground reinforcements in only 3 percent of them.<sup>(15)</sup> With Vietnamization, the situation undoubtedly improved, but even as late as 1969, the RF/PF units were receiving only 30 percent of the Vietnamese-fired artillery support, and half of that consisted not of support during a contact, but of small barrages at suspected VC/NVA locations, or preplanned fires against likely VC/NVA routes of attack.<sup>(16)</sup>

(U) Finally, the RF/PF for much of the war simply had poorer leadership, training, and arms than their VC/NVA counterparts, so they could not hold their own, particularly without support.

\*The 60 percent figure may be too low. The TFES reports more RF/PF combat deaths than do the *Southeast Asia Statistical Summary* data used here. The TFES figures raise the RF/PF share of 1971 RVNAF combat deaths to 68 percent, for example.

†Other figures from TFES, possibly more accurate, imply that a higher percentage of VC/NVA combat deaths were inflicted by the RF/PF.



TABLE 96. *The Regional and Popular Forces inflicted 30 percent of the VC/NVA deaths for less than 20 percent of the RVNAF dollar costs. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>Regional Forces and Popular Forces:</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>
% of RVNAF Combat Deaths	54	59	60
% of VC/NVA Combat Deaths	30	30	33
% of RVNAF Program Budget Costs <sup>a</sup>	16	19	18

<sup>a</sup>/ Source: Tables 7, 8, and 9 of Chapter III. Budget years are Fiscal Years.

The Vietnamization program improved the situation by furnishing M-16 rifles, mortars, radios, training, etc. to every RF/PF unit, but even this was not enough to redress the imbalance between casualties inflicted and casualties absorbed.

(U) The RF/PF forces performed well in helping to counter the VC/NVA Easter offensive in 1972. The shift to large-scale, main-force combat put them in the position of supporting main-force units in battle, and in many cases they fought VC/NVA regular units by themselves. A review of RF/PF operations during April-July 1972 suggests that they made a major contribution to the war effort. The data suggest that they even temporarily redressed the imbalance between casualties taken and casualties inflicted, which may mean that they were surprised by the VC/NVA fewer times and received more combat reinforcement and support. However, this is conjecture. Whatever the case, the RF/PF suffered 28 percent of the RVNAF combat deaths and claimed 37 percent of the VC/NVA combat deaths.<sup>(17)</sup> Their kill ratio (VC/NVA to RVNAF) was 2 to 1, the same as for the regulars. *This all suggests that the Vietnamization effort paid off handsomely in the 1972 offensive when the RF/PF apparently fought about as well as the regulars, at least in terms of casualty exchanges.*

(U) *Adding cost data to the assessment of effectiveness suggests that the RF/PF, dollar for dollar, were the most effective large force in killing VC/NVA troops in South Vietnam.* The figures indicate that the RF/PF accounted for 30 percent of the VC/NVA combat deaths inflicted by RVNAF forces, but received less than 20 percent of the RVNAF program budget costs (Table 96). More startling, the territorial forces accounted for 12 to 30

TABLE 97. *The Regional and Popular Forces accounted for up to 30 percent of the VC/NVA combat deaths for 4 percent of the total war costs. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>Regional Forces and Popular Forces</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>
% of Total VC/NVA Combat Deaths <sup>a</sup> /	12	20	30
% of Total Program Budget Costs <sup>b</sup> /	2	3	4

<sup>a</sup>/ Source: MACV Measurements of Progress Reports, January 1969-December 1971.

<sup>b</sup>/ Source: Tables 7, 8, and 9 of Chapter III. The Budget Years are Fiscal Years.

percent of all VC/NVA combat deaths, depending on the year, but for only 2 to 4 percent of the total program budget costs of the war (Table 97).

(U) These are macabre calculations because they purport to equate dollars and deaths, which is nonsense, but they do point up the incredibly unbalanced allocation of resources within the Allied war effort. The attrition objective alone would seem to have called for more resources and emphasis to the territorial forces. If 30 percent of the VC/NVA casualties can be gotten for only 4 percent of the resources, what might have happened if the Allies had allocated 10 percent of the resources to the RF/PF? The potential effects might have been staggering. And the RF/PF role in establishing territorial security has not even been put into the calculation yet.

(U) The primary mission of the territorial forces was to protect and secure the population, particularly in the rural areas. The HES data suggest that about half of the population relied on the RF/PF for the security of their hamlets (Table 84). Chapter XVII indicates that the RF/PF killed or captured more of the VC/NVA clandestine infrastructure than any other force.

(U) There is no doubt that the RF/PF contributed to the increasing security of the countryside discussed in Chapter XIII. It is tempting to give them all of the credit for the gains, but that is probably not the case, because the situation is more complex than that. Many other forces and programs participated in the pacification effort and surely had some effect. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the RF/PF increased 58 percent during 1968-69, while the secure population (A and B) increased 74 percent. And most of the



gain in security came in 1969 and 1970 after most of the RF/PF buildup was complete.

(U) Comparing the growth of the RF/PF with progress of the Rural Control Indicator in 1970-71 yields the interesting statistic that about 60 rural inhabitants came under GVN control for each RF/PF soldier added during the period (62 in 1970; 59 in 1971).<sup>\*</sup> From mid-1969 to mid-1970, the increase of 807 new units in Military Region 4 closely parallels the pacification gain of 801 hamlets in the A and B security ratings.<sup>(18)</sup>

(U) However, relying on the foregoing data to make the case for RF/PF can be misleading, because analysis of the period from April to September 1968 yields the dismaying findings (for RF/PF boosters) that the security ratings of the population not protected by the RF/PF improved about as often as the population they protected (11 percent of the unprotected population increased, compared to 12 percent of the protected).<sup>(19)</sup> This clearly suggests that other factors were also working to improve population security ratings.

(U) The same analysis indicated that RF/PF, working together, had the best effect on HES scores, followed by PF operating alone. The RF alone tended to be associated with security regressions, except in Military Region 4, where the RF/PF were the primary RVNAF combat forces.<sup>(19)</sup> The findings are reasonable. The RF were considered to be a flexible, mobile force, which could take part in large-unit operations with regular forces, replace ARVN battalions in providing territorial security, and provide a security umbrella for PF, RD Cadre, PSDF, and other GVN personnel tied down to hamlets.

(U) Thus, RF/PF working together provided mobile and static defense, and they could be expected to have a favorable impact on HES scores. About 80 percent of the PF units were recruited primarily from their own or adjacent villages, so they could not appear on the scene until the RF and regulars had established enough security in the area to allow the GVN to recruit the Popular Forces. Logically then, one could

expect to find improving security where PF appear. On the other hand, RF units were the mobile units that were supposed to show up in trouble spots to counter VC/NVA actions, which drag down the HES scores.

(U) The results of public opinion surveys in South Vietnam suggest that the people were more impressed with RF performance than with PF performance, and that they equated it with regular army (ARVN) performance. Forty percent thought the PF were effective, and 70 percent thought the RF were effective. Seventy percent of another sample thought the ARVN were effective.<sup>(20)</sup> Thus, the RF seemed to rate as well with the rural population as the ARVN.

*(U) It seems clear that the RF/PF, by their combat performance and their permanent presence in the countryside, had a profound and perhaps decisive effect on improving the security of the rural population. Yet they consumed less than 5 percent of the total costs of the war. There can be little question that the Regional and Popular Forces were the most cost-effective military forces employed on the Allied side. However, until the big pacification effort began in 1967-68, they were consistently neglected by both the GVN and United States.*

## THE PARAMILITARY FORCES

(U) The paramilitary forces discussed here are the National Police, the RD Cadre, Truong Son Cadre, and the PSDF (People's Self Defense Forces). These forces were not expected to seek combat with the VC/NVA forces, but, operating in the rural areas, they took a significant number of casualties while inflicting some on the VC/NVA. From 1968 through 1972, about 10,000 paramilitary personnel were killed in action.<sup>(21)</sup> They were credited with about 2,500 VC/NVA combat deaths, which indicates the disadvantage they suffered in fights with VC/NVA forces.<sup>(22)</sup>

### THE NATIONAL POLICE

(U) The National Police of South Vietnam performed normal police functions throughout the country, particularly in the cities and towns. In addition, the Field Police and Special Police (an intelligence collection branch) had special roles to play in the GVN war effort. Their primary mission was supposed to be the anti-VC Infrastructure

<sup>\*</sup>Calculated on the basis of present-for-duty strength in RF/PF combat units, not the authorized strengths shown elsewhere in this chapter.



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TABLE 98. National Police components; strength in thousands. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1968 Jun (U)	1969 Jun (C)	1970 Jun (C)	1971 Jun (C)	1972 Jun (C)
Police	68	48	58	86	80
Field Police <sup>b/</sup>	12	14	15	16 <sup>a/</sup>	17
Special Police	--	15	15	14 <sup>a</sup>	20
Total National Police	80	77	88	116	117

Source: Army Activities Report: Southeast Asia - Final Issue,  
Dec. 20, 1972, p. 45).

a/ As of September 30.

b/ Formerly National Police Field Force (NPFF).

campaign.<sup>(23)</sup> Their performance in this task is discussed later, in Chapter XVII. It was not very good, but they did manage to account for 20 percent of the VCI neutralized in 1970.<sup>(24)</sup> Table 83 (page 884) showed that the strength of the National Police increased from 52,000 in 1965 to 121,000 in December 1972, a gain of 130 percent. Table 98 shows the three components of the National Police from June 1968 through June 1972. The Field and Special Police made up about 30 percent of the police strength from 1969 onward.

(U) Until 1969, the National Police were most active in the secure areas where the population density was highest, and they concentrated on providing the services of a civil police body. Below the provincial level, police operations were centered in district towns. As security increased in the rural areas during 1969, the police expanded their operations from coverage of the district towns downward into villages, and at the end of 1969 more than 6,000 uniformed police were assigned to 1,621 villages.<sup>(23)</sup> From then on, much of the police expansion went into the rural areas. The HES data support the notion of a movement of the police into the countryside. In December 1969, about 65 percent of the population lived in villages that had National Police substations within the village. By December 1972, three years later, the figure was 95 percent.<sup>(25)</sup> As already seen in Table 84, the National Police were the force primarily responsible for the security of 17 percent of South Vietnam's population by December 1972.

(U) In the villages the National Police were charged with registering the village population

TABLE 99. The People's Self Defense Forces. (Table unclassified.)

	1969	1970	1971	1972
Combat				
Inter Team Members:				
Organized		447	498	460
Trained		372	486	435
Other Combat:				
Organized		731	895	543
Trained		671	837	324
Armed		380	593	558
Support:				
Organized		2311	3036	2826
Trained		1597	2508	N/A
Total:				
Organized	3219	3489	4429	3829
Trained	1898	2640	3831	N/A
Armed	400	380	593	558

Source: Army Activities Report: Southeast Asia - Final Issue (CSDCS-74),  
December 20, 1972, p. 51.

(issuing identification cards, establishing family books, census of village residents, etc.). In December 1969 the HES reported that these measures were complete and up to date for 40 percent of the total South Vietnamese population; three years later the figure was 89 percent.<sup>(26)</sup>

(U) The villagers were not impressed with the performance of the police. Only 30 percent thought they were effective in maintaining order,<sup>(27)</sup> and only 19 percent thought they were effective in upholding the law.<sup>(28)</sup> On the other hand, 71 percent of the villagers thought that the National Police acted fairly and justly with the people of the community all or most of the time; 20 percent thought they didn't.<sup>(29)</sup> This runs counter to the conventional stereotype of the South Vietnamese police held in the United States. But the sample was large (7,201 people) and the question was asked in eight different months, so the stereotype may be overdrawn. *Indeed, the data suggest that the police were considered inept, but tolerably fair.*

(U) Most observers would probably agree that the police weren't as effective as they needed to be. They didn't receive much in the way of GVN attention or resources until late in the war, partly because military mobilization absorbed all of the available manpower and RVNAF received priority. As security spread into the countryside, the GVN finally turned its attention to the police, transferring ARVN personnel to the force and initiating other measures to improve its capability.



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### REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT CADRE

(U) Begun in 1965 in Binh Dinh Province, the 59-man RD Cadre teams became the cutting edge of the new GVN Ministry of Revolutionary Development, created in 1965. The structure of the 59-man team was a defense platoon of 34 men, with the rest in small civic action teams. A team would go into a rural village and spend some time working with the people, attempting to gain their support for the GVN through a variety of civic action types of projects, and then moving on to another village. Later, beginning with the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) of late 1968, after ARVN battalions and the RF/PF were providing more security for pacification, each team was split into two 30-man civic-action teams, which were assigned to villages on a semi-permanent basis.

(U) The effectiveness of the RD Cadre and Truong Son Cadre is implied by the extent of the VC/NVA efforts against them. The cadres were designed to help the people and to counter the operations of the VC/NVA cadres operating in the hamlets and villages, and the VC/NVA immediately recognized the significance of the new group. Intelligence reports signified the VC/NVA intent to attack RD Cadre teams, and the latter began taking casualties soon after they started operating in 1966, when they lost almost 700 killed and captured.<sup>(30)</sup> By 1967-68, relative to their personnel strength, the cadre were being killed and were deserting at rates comparable to the RVNAF, and usually higher. Attrition of the RD Cadre for the first half of 1968 was at an annual rate of 26 percent.<sup>(31)</sup>

(U) As pacification succeeded and fewer new hamlets needed the cadre treatment, they were phased down, as shown in Table 83, from a peak of 53,000 in 1968 to 23,000 by the end of 1972.

### THE PEOPLE'S SELF DEFENSE FORCES

(U) The People's Self Defense Forces, created in 1968, were civilian forces organized into two groups—combat and support forces—ostensibly for local defense and as a supplement to the RF/PF. Major purposes were to commit as many people as possible to the GVN and to soak up manpower so as to deny it to the VC/NVA recruiters. Membership in the support forces was

voluntary, and all citizens 7 years of age or older could join. Support forces consisted of three groups: youth, women, and elders. Although support members were theoretically trained in first aid, medical evacuation, etc., a key purpose was to commit a large bloc of the population to the government.<sup>(32)</sup>

(U) The combat forces consisted of male citizens of ages 16 and 17 and those between 38 and 50, who were required by the National Mobilization Law to serve in the Combat PSDF. This encompassed all the non-draft-age men up to the age of 50. Able-bodied women and elders (over 50) could volunteer to serve in the combat forces.<sup>(32)</sup> Included in the combat forces were key interteam members, who were organized into 35-man teams, with each man being armed. (Combat PSDF in general were supposed to receive about one weapon for each five persons.) The key interteams were called KIT's. Their leaders and members were supposed to receive training over and above that given to general Combat PSDF, and several members from each KIT attended a 4-week KIT leader course.<sup>(33)</sup>

(U) Table 99 displays the data showing the size and status of the various segments of the force. The figures are notoriously unreliable, but they do serve to indicate the magnitude of the program, which claimed to have armed more than 500,000 people with M-1 rifles, BAR's, M-1 and M-2 carbines, and a few shotguns.<sup>(33)</sup>

(U) It seems clear from Table 84 (above) that the PSDF KIT's did replace some PF units as the force primarily responsible for the security of certain hamlets with high security ratings.<sup>(34)</sup> Coverage of the population by the PF dropped from 47 percent to 39 percent between 1969 and 1972, while the PSDF coverage rose from 24 to 35 percent. By December 1972, more than 90 percent of the population reportedly lived in hamlets where the PSDF were standing armed guard (20 percent) or were conducting armed patrols within the hamlets (73 percent).<sup>(35)</sup>

(U) When asked if they took part in PSDF activities, 66 percent of the rural PAAS respondents said no.<sup>(36)</sup> When asked why, they gave sex and age as the reason for not participating,<sup>(37)</sup> which suggests they may not have been aware of the requirements for joining the PSDF. On the



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other hand, 22 percent of the respondents said they had been issued weapons and stood guard in the hamlet. Asked about the performance of the

PSDF, 49 percent of the respondents rated them effective.<sup>(38)</sup> This was a better rating than the PF got.



## Chapter XV

### Gauging Vietnamese Popular Attitudes

(U) Extensive efforts were made to discern popular attitudes in a war that was regarded as being fought for the people's support. Again, it was the CORDS pacification advisors who took the lead, with monthly opinion polls from late 1969 onward.

(U) Three sets of Vietnamese public opinion surveys are analyzed here. The first set consists of two surveys by the JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office) in South Vietnam from October through December 1965. The second survey was done for CBS by the Opinion Research Corporation a year later (November 1966 to February 1967). The third, and most important, set of surveys is the PAAS (Pacification Attitude Analysis System), a monthly survey started during the fourth quarter of 1969. The JUSPAO and CBS polls are summarized briefly below. Some general findings from the PAAS are also discussed, but specific results dealing with security, land reform, economics, etc. appear in the appropriate chapters on those topics.

#### THE JUSPAO SURVEY (OCTOBER–DECEMBER 1965)<sup>(39)</sup>

(U) The JUSPAO surveys were not taken as carefully as the CBS survey. Interviewers could select their respondents at will in many cases. Age, sex, and religious distributions were distorted, and the lower economic classes were overrepresented. Similar problems appear in the PAAS, but in both cases the results are interesting and useful.

(U) The JUSPAO surveys suggest that the average

Vietnamese in 1965 considered personal economic problems to be his primary concern; 42 percent of a Saigon sample (of 410 people) cited the high cost of living or personal finances as the most important problem they faced. In a combined urban–rural sample (1,141 people), 41 percent were dissatisfied with life. Most of them cited the cost of living and family finances as the source of dissatisfaction. The one wish for life that all respondents cited most often (35 percent of all responses) was for a better working condition and a lower cost of living. A desire for greater government responsiveness to their needs was the next most frequent wish (29 percent), followed by a wish for peace and unity (20 percent). *Thus, the Vietnamese in late 1965 were engrossed in their personal economic problems. Only 6 percent considered the war to be of primary concern.*

#### THE CBS SURVEY (NOVEMBER 1966–FEBRUARY 1967)<sup>(40)</sup>

(U) The CBS survey covered 436 Saigon residents, 132 residents of smaller cities, and 745 people in 11 provinces, all in secure areas. The survey underrepresents males of military age and farmers. But it has the virtue of being conducted without the knowledge of U.S. or GVN officials, and it used rigid statistical sampling techniques to ensure a representative sample of all age categories and social strata.

(U) *The survey confirms that economic goals ranked very high in Vietnamese personal aspirations. A majority (64 percent) of the 1,413 respondents*



chose better employment, income, or cost of living conditions as their first wish for self or family. They cited economic factors (cost of living, unemployment, income opportunities, family finances) most frequently as the main causes for improvement or deterioration in their lives during the past year.

(U) *For their country, the Vietnamese respondents overwhelmingly desired peace and security as their first wish (84 percent). Victory, independence, and freedom drew a response of only 9 percent. In answer to the question, "What should the American forces do in the South?" the Vietnamese responded as shown in Table 100. When asked whether the Americans should devote more attention to negotiating with North Vietnam or fighting, 63 percent opted for more negotiations. Only 15 percent chose more military action (22 percent had no opinion).*

(U) *In sum, the CBS survey suggested a strong personal concern with economic problems and a general wish for peace and security, preferably from negotiation, not fighting.*

### THE PACIFICATION ATTITUDE ANALYSIS SYSTEM (PAAS)

(U) The Pacification Attitude Analysis System (PAAS) attempted to portray urban and rural South Vietnamese attitudes toward security, politics, and economic development. It was developed by the Pacification Studies Group of CORDS and by the Central Pacification and Development Council of the Government of Vietnam, with the help of U.S. contract survey experts. Monthly PAAS results began with October 1969 for the rural population and with March 1971 for the urban population. The surveys portrayed two types of information: trends or shifts in opinion and reactions to specific events. To indicate trends, the same questions were used at reasonable intervals. Special questions were asked to elicit reactions to specific events. As the system matured, special questions became the rule, and the trends are difficult to follow.

(U) The surveys were based on semistructured interviews conducted by trained Vietnamese interviewers who worked for CORDS, not the GVN. A typical rural survey covered 30 to 35 provinces,

TABLE 100. *What should the American forces do in the south? (Table unclassified.)*

Go on fighting	39%
Stop fighting, stay as advisors	21%
Stop fighting, go home	10%
No opinion	30%
Total	100%

and three-man teams (three per province) were assigned to a specific hamlet for interviews. The cadre memorized the survey questions before entering the hamlet and, guided by pre-established criteria, selected respondents. The questions were asked indirectly in the course of conversation, and the replies were coded in predetermined categories immediately afterward. The same procedure was followed in the urban interviews, which concentrated on the 13 autonomous cities.

(U) Any systematic effort to portray attitudes and beliefs is subject to error, and conditions in South Vietnam further limit the accuracy that is possible. The limitations of PAAS outlined below need to be kept in mind when reviewing the PAAS data presented here and elsewhere, but it was the only regular polling done in South Vietnam other than elections and was quite useful in providing indications of Vietnamese public opinion. In August 1970, for example, answers to the question, "What tickets will win in the Senate election?" called the first three winning tickets in exact order.<sup>(41)</sup>

#### PAAS LIMITATIONS

(U) Two limitations of the PAAS should be kept in mind when viewing the results. They stem from the way in which the data were collected and from deficiencies in the sampling techniques used.

(U) *Data Collection Limitations.* Semistructured interviews which sought opinions indirectly during conversation instead of posing direct, precise questions were probably the only realistic means to obtain a frank response from the Vietnamese at any time, let alone in the middle of a war. Unfortunately, the technique could not avoid introducing the bias of the questioner into the results, because PAAS actually presented what the interviewer thought the respondent meant in responding to a



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TABLE 101. *What are your aspirations for the future? (Table unclassified.)*

Peace for Viet-Nam	49%
Security in the countryside	27%
Stabilization and normalization of social standards	12%
Better economic life	11%
Source: PAAS Rural Question 55, from published reports.	

line of conversation that the interviewer developed. The PAAS did not record a respondent's clear-cut answer to a direct, precisely stated question. It therefore differs from some public opinion polls conducted in the United States, and the results must be viewed as being much less precise.

(U) Interview training can minimize interviewer bias, and the training was careful and rigorous, but it cannot completely eliminate the tendency of the interviewer to interject his own beliefs and opinions into the way he phrases the question and interprets the response. In addition, most respondents were probably reluctant to be completely candid on all subjects surveyed (the results on payment of taxes bear this out). The questioners were not formally identified as GVN agents, and they employed a wide range of "covers" designed to allay suspicion. But they could not help being viewed as "strangers" by respondents, who probably often associated the questioner with the GVN because of his conversational interests. Respondents undoubtedly considered these factors in responding, which in turn limited the accuracy of the survey.

(U) *Sampling Limitations.* Quota rather than probability sampling techniques were used to select the hamlets and the individual respondents, so the sample from which interviews were drawn was not necessarily an accurate representation of the South Vietnamese population. The rural PAAS tended, for example, to overrepresent the attitudes of "C" hamlet populations in 1970. In October 1970, "C" hamlets accounted for 18 percent of the rural population, but for 37 percent of the rural respondents to PAAS. Women represented only 30 to 40 percent of the respondents and no civilian authorities or paid members of a military organization were interviewed.

(U) The second difficulty with the sample was its size. As many as 3,000 respondents were inter-

TABLE 102. *What do you consider the most important problem facing the country at this time? (Table unclassified.)*

	Rural a/	Urban b/
Peace -- End the War As Soon as Possible	52%	45%
Security	16%	14%
Fight the VC Harder	13%	11%
Economic	13%	20%
Number of Respondents	3781	3183

a/ PAAS Rural Question Number 135 asked in June 1971 and June, July, August 1972.

b/ PAAS Urban Question Number 5038 asked March, June, July 1971 and June, July, August 1972.

viewed in a given month, but in most cases each respondent was asked only one-third of the questions involved in the three-part interview. In effect, only about 30 people in a given province answered a given question in the monthly rural PAAS. A different sample was supposed to be used each month, but even so, the limitations were probably significant.

(U) But the PAAS was a useful system, despite its limitations, and it yielded considerable insight into the situation in South Vietnam—insight that probably could not have been gained in any other way.

## PAAS RESULTS\*

(U) A few themes from the PAAS 1970-72 are explored here. These include surveys of the people's views about their problems and aspirations, security, the media, government performance, the war, and the Americans. Other themes, such as inflation, land reform, performance of Allied forces, the Chieu Hoi Program, etc. are addressed in the chapters devoted to those subjects.

### ASPIRATIONS

(U) During every month in 1970, as well as in

\*Most of the figures used here and in the following chapters were derived from CORDS computer tapes. They sometimes differ slightly from those published in the PAAS monthly hard copy report because they have been adjusted to reflect the actual geographical distribution of the rural South Vietnamese population. The adjustment compensates for the tendency of the quota interview system used by the PAAS to overrepresent the opinions collected from less populated areas of the country.



TABLE 103. *What is the most severe problem facing you? (Table unclassified.)*

Increased Prices and Financial Problems	56%
Security	24%
Other	20%
Respondents	27,483

Source: PAAS published reports for 1970.

TABLE 104. *What is the most severe rural problem? (Table unclassified.)*

None	18%
Security	25%
Lack of Means (12%) or Money (5%) to Grow Crops	17%
Lack of Essential Goods or Their Very High Prices	17%

Source: PAAS Rural Question 467, asked in January 1972, from unpublished computer printout.

February 1971,\* the PAAS teams asked rural respondents, "What are your aspirations for the future?" Altogether, about 15,000 people responded as shown in Table 101. About 75 percent of the respondents, on average, expressed a desire for peace or security as their first aspiration, with the monthly percentages ranging from 73 to 84 percent. These results agree well with those of the CBS poll taken four years earlier, when 84 percent expressed an aspiration for peace and security.

(U) The proportion aspiring to peace jumped to about 60 percent after the GVN/U.S. peace initiative in October 1970, with most of the gain coming out of the aspiration for security. Awareness of the peace initiative was high: In the November 1970 survey, 79 percent of the rural respondents said they were aware that a new proposal had been made. A special survey conducted in provincial capitals—areas of greater exposure to national news media—indicated that 97 percent knew about the initiative. The high rates of awareness reflect the extensive publicity that accompanied the proposal in South Vietnam and the strong desire for peace.

(U) An urban survey in October 1971 suggested that aspirations of the city dwellers were less

\*The question was not asked in the rural areas after February.

TABLE 105. *What is the most severe urban problem? (Table unclassified.)*

Theft	29%
Crowded Conditions, Lack of Housing	14%
Inadequate Garbage Collection, Water and Electricity	14%
Flooding in Slum Areas	13%
Traffic	10%
Poor Social Environment for Raising Children	9%
Number of Respondents	3054

Source: PAAS Urban Question 5101, asked in March, April, May, June, July, and October 1971 and in September 1972, from unpublished computer printout.

concerned about security (7 percent) than those of the respondents in the rural areas and were more concerned about social standards (16 percent) and a better economic life (15 percent).<sup>(42)</sup> The pattern reflects the insulation of city dwellers from the security problems of the war, and it seems reasonable.

PROBLEMS

(U) In 1971 and 1972, rural and urban respondents were asked, "What do you consider the most important problem facing the country at this time?" Table 102 shows again a difference between the rural and urban attitudes. Sixty-eight percent of the rural respondents considered peace and security the most important problem, while 59 percent of the urban dwellers agreed. Only 13 percent of the rural respondents considered economic problems the most important, in comparison to 20 percent of the urban dwellers. But the similarity regarding the war was perhaps most significant: Few urban (11 percent) and rural (13 percent) respondents thought fighting harder against the VC/NVA was the main problem. This was comparable to the CBS response of only 9 percent who aspired to victory, independence, and freedom rather than peace and security.

(U) Throughout 1970, PAAS rural surveys asked, "What is the most severe problem facing you?"



TABLE 106. *How does security compare with last month? (Percentage.) (Table unclassified.)*

	1969	1970		1971		1971	
	Dec	Jun	Dec	Jun	Jan	Jun	Dec
Better (%)	35	33	45	22	30	14	25
Worse (%)	15	20	6	11	9	16	9
Same (%)	48	47	48	67	59	69	63
Number of Respondents	n/a	n/a	1104	936	930	898	1343

Source: PAAS Rural Survey Reports and unpublished computer printouts of Question 32.

TABLE 107. *How do you get information about national/international and local affairs? (Percentage of respondents.) (Table unclassified.)*

Source	National/International		Local/Provincial	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Radio	49	28	19	18
Television	3	13	a/	7
Newspapers	6	31	5	4
Local Officials	16	3	34	43
Friends & Neighbors	12	8	21	13
Don't know or Don't care	13	18	11	10
No. of Respondents	4904	599	4904	599

Sources: PAAS published reports. Rural surveys taken in March, July, October, December 1970; and February 1971 (Questions 46 and 47). PAAS Urban survey January 1972; Questions 5269 and 5270.

a/ TV was not a response for local/provincial affairs in the rural surveys.

The cumulative answer is shown in Table 103. Increased prices and financial problems were considered the worst problems by more than half of the respondents, and the trend during the year was upward—from 48 percent in the second quarter of 1970 to 64 percent in the fourth quarter.

(U) On the other hand, the percentage who considered security their worst problem stayed fairly constant at about 24 percent throughout the year. This percentage is about the same as the 27 percent who *aspired* to security for Vietnam during the same period. Taken together, they suggest that at least 25 percent of the South Vietnamese population in the rural areas lived under insecure conditions during 1970. According to the HES (Chapter XIII), 75 percent of the population were rated secure (A and B) in December 1970, so there is some convergence of PAAS and HES here. Moreover, when 922 rural respondents were asked, in January 1972, "What is the most severe rural problem?" 25 percent responded, "security." The range of responses is shown in Table 104. The urban form of insecurity seemed to be theft. When asked, "What is the most severe urban problem?"

TABLE 108. *Do the people have the responsibility of helping the government keep the Viet Cong out of their hamlets? (Table unclassified.)*

	Rural a/	Urban b/
No	24%	11%
Yes	71%	83%
No. of Respondents	11,190	1989

a/ "What the Vietnamese Peasant Thinks," SEA Analysis Rpt., Jan-Feb 1971, p. 21; includes data for all of 1970.

b/ PAAS Urban Question 5065, asked in March, June, and July 1972; from unpublished computer printout.

TABLE 109. *Whose responsibility is it to improve community life? (Table unclassified.)*

	Rural	Urban
The Government (%)	36	24
The People (%)	7	6
Both (%)	52	61
No. of Respondents	898	700

Source: PAAS Rural Question 129 and Urban Question 5129, both asked in June 1972.

29 percent of the urban respondents answered, "Theft." See Table 105.

SECURITY

(U) From the beginning of PAAS in the late 1969, respondents were frequently asked to compare the state of security this month with security last month. The results at the end and middle of each year are shown in Table 106. The only pronounced trend seems to be a one-time shift of opinion from the "security is better" category to the "security is the same" category in June 1971. This can be interpreted to suggest that the security situation had stabilized by then in the eyes of most of the rural population. The urban surveys tended to support this, because the respondents in the cities were more secure to begin with and 85 percent of them, on average, indicated security was the same<sup>(43)</sup> this month as last month.

(U) The other pattern of interest suggests that the rural Vietnamese clearly felt the war cycle described



TABLE 110. *How well does the government perform?*  
(Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
As well as can be expected under the circumstances	41%	45%
Adequate	30%	29%
Inadequate	8%	15%
No. of Respondents	4209	2865

Source: PAAS Rural Question 243 and Urban Question 5243, both asked in June, July, August, and December 1972.

TABLE 111. *How well does your provincial (city) council perform?* (Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
As well as could be expected under the circumstances	6%	4%
Adequate	17%	16%
<u>Inadequate or Incapable</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>46%</u>
Does Not Know	40%	30%
No. of Respondents	4414	2063

Source: PAAS Rural Question 201 and Urban Question 5202, both asked in March, April, May, and June 1971 and May 1972.

in Chapter II. The “better” ratings were always higher in December and January than in June, and each year the “worse” ratings were highest in June, the month when the VC/NVA winter-spring offensive was finally coming to an end. The same pattern held for the urban respondents.<sup>(43)</sup>

INFORMATION SOURCES

(U) Radio, newspapers (for city dwellers), and local officials were the predominant sources of news and information about international, national, and local affairs, according to PAAS.

(U) Three rural surveys<sup>(44)</sup> asked 2,846 respondents whether they owned a radio, and one (895 respondents) also asked if they had access to one. Fifty-one percent of the rural respondents said they owned a radio, 7 percent said they had regular access to one, and 20 percent had infrequent access. Only 22 percent had no radio or no access to one. In the urban areas, 76 percent of the respondents said they owned a radio in each of the two surveys taken.<sup>(45)</sup> The question of

TABLE 112. *How will the war end?* (Table unclassified.)

<u>Rural</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>
<u>GVN Victory</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>12%</u>
Paris Talks	16%	15%	21%
Don't Know	18%	23%	48%
No. of Rural Respondents	11,149	1968	1744

1970 data is from "What the Vietnamese Peasant Thinks", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, January-February 1971, p. 18. 1971-1972 data are from PAAS Rural Question 266 asked in February and May 1971, and in June and July 1972.

TABLE 113. *When will the war end?* (Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>		<u>Urban</u>	
	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>
Within 6 Months	1%	13%	5%	18%
Within 1 year	7%	16%	6%	22%
Subtotal	8%	29%	11%	40%
Within 1-2 Years	16%	7%	11%	9%
Will Go on Indefinitely <sup>a/</sup>	22%	9%	39%	14%
Don't Know	53%	55%	35%	37%
No. of Respondents	2736	2693	1192	1895

PAAS Urban Question 5214, and PAAS Rural Question 213 for May, June, and July in 1971 and in 1972. From unpublished computer printouts.

<sup>a/</sup> Includes within 2-4 years and within 4-8 years responses.

access was posed to 687 respondents in the second urban survey; 10 percent had regular access to radio, 5 percent had infrequent access, and 9 percent had no access to a radio. Thus, 86 percent of the urban respondents had regular access to a radio.

(U) Urban respondents also read newspapers. A survey of 269 respondents in March 1972 revealed that 40 percent read newspapers frequently, 31 percent read them but seldom, and only 29 percent didn't read them at all.<sup>(46)</sup> The sample was small, but the results probably were roughly right, because newspapers have remained a contentious issue in Vietnam, and, in Saigon at least, were for sale everywhere.

(U) Thus, the South Vietnamese people were being reached by modern methods of communication. Table 107 shows that 49 percent of the rural respondents got their national and international news from radio. The city dwellers got theirs from



TABLE 114. *Why do the VC/NVA continue to fight?*  
(Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>		<u>Urban</u>
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1972</u>
Influence of North Viet-Nam	38%	24%	30%
Influence of Other Foreign Powers	<u>6%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>23%</u>
Subtotal	44%	37%	53%
Believe Their Cause is Just	6%	10%	7%
Haven't Accomplished Their Goal	11%	18%	18%
Don't Know or Won't Respond	34%	31%	22%
No. of Respondents	1806	1852	1384

Sources:  
PAAS Rural Questions 56 in June and July 1970, plus Question 244 in June and July 1972. PAAS Urban Question 5244 in June and July 1972. From published PAAS reports and unpublished computer printouts.

TABLE 115. *Do you want a cease-fire?* (Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Yes, under any circumstances	<u>16%</u>	<u>14%</u>
Yes, if no GVN territory is lost	72%	74%
Yes, if I don't have to live under VC/NVA control	11%	10%
Yes, if I don't have to live under GVN control	1%	1%
No. of Respondents	1843	2182

Sources:  
PAAS Rural Question 263 asked in June and July 1972, and PAAS Urban Question 5263 asked in June, July and October 1972. From unpublished computer printouts.

the radio (28 percent) and the newspaper (31 percent). The prime source of local news was local officials (rural, 34 percent, and urban, 43 percent).

THE GOVERNMENT

(U) More Vietnamese in the rural areas than the people in the cities seemed to expect the government to assume responsibilities a bit more. When asked if the people had the responsibility of helping the government keep the VC/NVA out of their hamlet, rural and urban respondents answered as in Table 108. The same tendency showed up in response to the question, "Whose responsibility is it to improve community life?" More rural people expected the government to shoulder the responsibility; see Table 109.

(U) Rural and urban respondents felt about the

TABLE 116. *Is there anti-American feeling in your community?* (Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
	<u>5%</u>	<u>10%</u>
Yes		
Yes, but only among a very few people	<u>13%</u>	<u>23%</u>
Subtotal - Yes	18%	33%
No	62%	51%
Does not know	18%	16%
No. of Respondents	4463	1975

Sources:  
PAAS Rural Question 219, and PAAS Urban Question 5220 both asked in March, April, May, June and July 1971. From unpublished computer printout.

TABLE 117. *Has the presence of the Americans been beneficial to the people of Vietnam?* (Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Greatly	36%	13%
To Some Extent	<u>24%</u>	<u>33%</u>
Subtotal-Beneficial	60%	46%
Scarcely	19	30
No Benefit, No Harm	11	11
Bad Effect	2	5
No. of Respondents	1732	774

Sources:  
PAAS Rural Question 214 and PAAS Urban Question 5215 asked in March and April 1971. From unpublished computer printout.

same when asked about the performance of the national government, although a higher percentage of urban respondents thought government performance was inadequate, as shown in Table 110. The differences between the two stem largely from the fewer urban responses in the "don't know" category (9 percent urban versus 20 percent rural). In both the rural and urban cases, the number of people who thought the government was performing fairly well outnumbered those who thought it was only adequate or inadequate. This could stem from a reluctance to criticize the national government. On the other hand, a significant number of people did not hesitate to label the government as inadequate, so other factors are likely at play here. Moreover, the respondents did not hesitate to express their dissatisfaction with the performance of their local provincial or city council, although



TABLE 118. *Whether or not you think the Americans have helped Vietnam, do you like them personally? (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Like (%)	37	12
Don't Like, but Don't Hate (%)	52	78
Hate (%)	3	6
No. of Respondents	1729	772

PAAS Rural Question 215 and PAAS Urban Question 5216, both asked in March and April 1971. From unpublished computer printouts.

the number of "don't know" responses was large; see Table 111.

THE WAR

(U) Four PAAS questions were designed to solicit the Vietnamese people's view of the war. They were asked how and when the war would end, why the VC/NVA continued to fight, and if the respondent wanted a cease-fire. All four questions, except the one about the cease-fire, drew many "don't know" responses—and well they might!

(U) Rural responses about how the war would end are shown in Table 112. (Urban responses, if any, are not available). The big shift of views came in 1972, when the percentage expecting GVN victory dropped sharply, with most of the drop showing up in the "don't know" category and some going into "Paris talks." The 1972 surveys were taken in June and July, and the results suggest that the VC/NVA offensive had taken its toll of hopes for a GVN victory. The VC/NVA victory choice (not shown) drew little or no response, but this notion may have entered into some of the "don't know" responses. There is no way to determine if this was the case. The trends may be more reliable than some others from the PAAS, because it is possible to compare two sets of identical months with similar sample sizes, and the "don't know" responses did not change much over time. Rural and urban data are available for both samples. The data suggest that in 1971 few people expected the war to end within a year (8 percent rural and 11 percent urban), but many changed to a more optimistic view in 1972 (rural now at 29 percent, urban at 40 percent); see Table 113. The shift came from those who had expected the war to last longer, because the "don't knows" changed little.

(U) When asked why the VC/NVA continued to

TABLE 119. *How do you think the American character harmonizes with the Vietnamese character? (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Good Harmony	4%	0%
Fair Harmony	26%	13%
Little Harmony	34%	34%
Disharmony	13%	32%
Do Not Know	22%	19%
No. of Respondents	1732	774

PAAS Rural Question 216 and Urban Question 5217, asked in March and April 1971. From unpublished computer printouts.

TABLE 120. *On which side does most of the dislike or hostility lie? (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
On the Vietnamese side	9%	3%
Equally on both sides	54%	53%
On the American side	35%	37%
No. of Respondents	368	274

PAAS Rural Question 218 and PAAS Urban Question 5219, asked in March and April 1971. From unpublished computer printouts.

fight, the most frequent response (37 and 53 percent) cited the influence of North Vietnam and other foreign powers. A few mentioned the VC/NVA inability to accomplish its goal yet. Table 114 displays the data.

(U) Did the South Vietnamese people want a cease-fire? The PAAS data answered with a resounding yes. The "don't knows" disappeared as the people answered with some variation of "yes." Table 115 shows the results. The cease-fire pattern fits well with the answers to questions about the people's aspirations over the years, in which peace and security consistently accounted for 75 to 85 percent of the responses.

THE AMERICANS

(U) During the first half of 1971 the urban and rural surveys asked questions about the Vietnamese attitudes toward Americans and relations with them. *One finding that emerges from all of the questions is that the rural population held Americans in higher regard than did the urban population.* This may be partly because U.S.-backed pacification programs were focused primarily in rural areas,



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TABLE 121. *What do you think of the U.S. troop withdrawal? (Table unclassified.)*

	April-May-June <sup>a/</sup>		May <sup>b/</sup>		
	1970	1971	1970	1971	1972
	%	%	%	%	%
GVN Troops Should Replace U.S. Forces as Soon as Possible	2 <u>c/</u>	7	2 <u>c/</u>	7	6
Withdrawal Necessary, But do it Only When GVN Forces can Replace	12	19	15	18	18
GVN Can Replace, but Need Some U.S. Until War is Over	19	23	21	24	23
Withdrawal Will Make it Harder for GVN to Win	11	9	15	11	17
Not Aware of Withdrawal	42	31	34	31	16
Don't Know	12	7	11	5	17
No. of Respondents	2621	2695	856	927	848

- a/ Sources for 1970 are published PAAS reports for April, May and July 1970. Source for 1971 is unpublished computer printout displaying PAAS Rural Question 67 for April, May and July 1971.
- b/ Sources are published May PAAS report for May 1970, and unpublished computer printouts displaying Rural Question 67 for May 1971 and May 1972.
- c/ In 1970 this statement said that GVN troops can and should replace U.S. forces as soon as possible.

TABLE 122. *Why are the American troops being withdrawn? (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>Rural</u>
They have defeated the VC/NVA, so are no longer required	9%
They can't defeat the VC/NVA, so are withdrawing	4%
GVN has asked the U.S. to withdraw, because they are strong enough to defeat the VC/NVA	20%
The U.S. is negotiating with North Viet-Nam so that U.S. and NVA forces will leave Viet-Nam	13%
Pressure from the American people has forced the withdrawal of U.S. forces	37%
No. of Respondents	3500

Published PAAS reports for April, May, and July 1970. PAAS Rural Question 68, asked in April, May, June, and July 1971, from unpublished computer printout.

with CORDS advisory teams in every district and province.

(U) Table 116 indicates that 18 percent of the rural population thought anti-American feeling existed in their communities, and most of that feeling was thought to be limited to a very few people. The urban response was 33 percent. In both cases, though, more than half of the respondents thought there was no perceptible anti-American feeling in their communities.

TABLE 123. *Is it wise for the U.S. troops to withdraw? (Table unclassified.)*

	May-June 1970	May-June 1971	May 1972
Wise (%)	64	59	44
Unwise (%)	15	17	18
Does Not Know (%)	20	23	38
No. of Respondents	2650 (est)	1212	804

PAAS published reports for May and June, 1970. PAAS Rural Question 69 from unpublished computer printout for 1971 and 1972.



TABLE 124. *Why do you think the decision to withdraw U.S. troops is a wise one? (Table unclassified.)*

	May-June 1970	May-June 1971	May 1972
Neutralizes an important VC/NVA propaganda weapon	33%	23%	32%
Promotes Nationalism and self sufficiency	17%	18%	28%
Will help promote results at the Paris peace talks	16%	13%	19%
Will help reduce disruption of the Vietnamese economy	11%	3%	7%
Will help silence anti-war sentiment in the U.S.	8%	31%	10%
Withdrawal will reduce fighting and killing in Viet-Nam	14%	8%	4%
No. of Respondents	1700 (est.)	715	354

Sources: Published PAAS reports for May and June 1970; Rural Question 70, from unpublished computer printout for 1971 and 1972.

(U) In March and May 1971, the PAAS conducted a special survey asking about the Vietnamese view of Americans and the relations between the two. Again, the rural respondents had a more favorable view of the Americans. Table 117 indicates that 60 percent of the rural respondents felt the American presence had been beneficial to the people of South Vietnam; 46 percent of the urban respondents thought so, too. These percentages agree well with those who felt that no anti-American feeling existed in their communities (62 percent and 51 percent; see Table 116).

(U) In Table 118, thirty-seven percent of the rural respondents said they liked Americans, but only 12 percent of the urban respondents said they did. More than half of all respondents said they didn't like Americans, but they didn't hate them either. A few hated them. The size of the two groups who liked Americans corresponds closely to those who thought that the American presence was greatly beneficial, and the other categories match pretty well, too.

(U) The next question asked about the harmony between the American and Vietnamese characters, and very few thought good harmony existed between the two. Most thought there was little harmony or disharmony. Table 119 shows the results.

(U) In another variation on the theme, the surveys asked if dislike or hostility existed between Americans and Vietnamese.<sup>(47)</sup> The patterns are similar to those regarding anti-American feelings

TABLE 125. *If all U.S. troops leave Vietnam, what will happen to the war? (Table unclassified.)*

	1971	May 1971	May 1972
No Problem	13%	14%	8%
Some Problems	36%	40%	30%
Very Dangerous	22%	20%	25%
Subtotal	58%	60%	55%
Coalition Government, Cede Some Areas to the VC/NVA	2%	2%	4%
Communists Will Win	2%	1%	2%
Does Not Know	24%	21%	26%
Does Not Want to Respond	2%	1%	5%
Number of Respondents	4450	928	848

PAAS Rural Question 71, asked in April, May, June, and July 1971, and in May 1972. From unpublished computer printout.

(Table 116). When the respondents who said hostility existed were asked on which side the hostility lay, the rural and urban respondents agreed for the first time (Table 120). More than half felt the dislike was on both sides, and other 35 percent felt it was on the American side, because "Americans do not like Vietnamese."

#### U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS

(U) The PAAS rural surveys asked people what they thought of the U.S. troop withdrawals in 1970, 1971, and 1972; moreover, they asked them in some of the same months, so trends can be addressed. Table 121 shows the results. In the second quarter of 1970, 42 percent of the rural respondents didn't know about the withdrawals, although they started in the summer of 1969. By May 1972 only 16 percent were unaware of them. Vietnamese opinion remained fairly stable during the periods shown, and no trends are apparent.

(U) If the respondent was aware of the troop withdrawals, he or she was asked why the troops were withdrawing. Data for several months in 1970 and 1971 indicate that 37 percent of the rural respondents said that the U.S. withdrawals were caused by pressure from the American people. The results are shown in Table 122.



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(U) Respondents aware of the withdrawals were also asked whether the decision was wise. The data indicate that 64 percent thought it was wise in 1970, but by May 1972 people were having second thoughts (as the VC/NVA offensive peaked) and the percentage was down to 44 percent. Table 123 shows the results for three comparable periods in 1970, 1971, and 1972.

(U) Of the respondents who thought it was wise for the U.S. troops to withdraw, it was asked why they thought so, and the results are shown in Table 124. Note the emphasis on neutralizing VC/NVA propaganda in all years, particularly in 1970 and 1972. Silencing U.S. antiwar sentiment

was given as a major reason (31 percent) in 1971, and the promotion of nationalism and self-sufficiency also was a major reason (28 percent) in 1972.

(U) In 1971 and 1972, rural surveys asked 4,450 respondents what would happen to the war if all U.S. troops left Vietnam. The results are shown in Table 125. Fifty-five to sixty percent of the respondents consistently thought there would be some problems or danger if all U.S. forces left Vietnam. As in other data, May 1972 is the most pessimistic month, but the differences are not great.



## Chapter XVI

### Chieu Hoi

(U) Through its Chieu Hoi ("Open Arms") Program, the GVN offered the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese operating in the south an opportunity to defect, gain a political pardon, and even take vocational training to help them find jobs after leaving the Chieu Center. The defectors were called ralliers (Hoi Chanh).

#### THE CHIEU HOI PROGRAM

##### MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

(U) The GVN established the Chieu Hoi program in 1963 at the urging of advisors who were familiar with the successful amnesty and resettlement programs in the Philippines and Malaya.<sup>(48)</sup> Despite misgivings about amnesty for the VC/NVA, President Diem approved the program, and almost 5,000 ralliers came in during the first three months.<sup>(49)</sup> But the South Vietnamese were not enthusiastic, and 18 months later, the program remained a modest, underfunded effort. By 1965, the U.S. Government had endorsed the program but did not pour resources into it (only one American was formally associated with the program in Vietnam); and the GVN, noting this, continued to give the program a low priority, downgrading it to the point where a Vietnamese Army captain was the top Chieu Hoi official.<sup>(50)</sup>

(U) By 1966, the low cost and high benefits of the program were evident to all, and it began to gain momentum. United States officials, fortified by the program's success, were able to turn it around, and by December 1967 it was being run by a GVN cabinet minister.<sup>(51)</sup> But the GVN still was not completely convinced.

(U) Meanwhile, in April 1967, the GVN adopted the policy of "national reconciliation." Its intent was to not only give the rallier amnesty and return his political and civil rights, but to add training and aid in finding new careers commensurate with the Hoi Chanh's experience, ability, and loyalty. The policy was designed to induce high level VC/NVA to rally; but few did, and the program was never widely implemented.<sup>(49)</sup> The GVN remained reluctant to give the Hoi Chanh good jobs.

(U) The Tet offensive in 1968 marked a watershed in the program. At first it lost momentum, but its assets and people survived intact. More important, the GVN attitude changed for the better because, with few exceptions, the ralliers remained loyal during the offensive.<sup>(52)</sup> As 1968 drew to a close the Hoi Chanh began to pour in, and in 1969 the Chieu Hoi program hit its peak, as the factors contributing to a large flow of ralliers came into full play: (1) a well-organized and well-funded Chieu Hoi program; (2) lots of potential ralliers who were tapped as the GVN expanded its presence into the countryside;\* and (3) increased security in the rural areas with economic development beginning to reach down to the village level.

#### WHAT DID THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

(U) The rural South Vietnamese said that the Chieu Hoi Program was a good idea, but they

\*Recall the population security data for 1969 (Chapter XIII), which showed the GVN moving out into the countryside in a significant way for the first time ever.



shared the GVN's reluctance to trust the Hoi Chanh who came in under the program. In August 1972, a PAAS rural survey asked 1,025 respondents: "Do you feel that it is wise for the GVN to give the VC an opportunity to rally?"<sup>(53)</sup> Eighty percent said yes, only 2 percent said no, and the other 18 percent didn't know. In October 1971, and again in August 1972, the PAAS asked a total of 1,943 rural respondents: "Do you feel that the existence of a Chieu Hoi policy will help end the war more quickly?"<sup>(54)</sup> This time, only 65 percent of the respondents said yes (72 percent in the August sample), 7 percent said no, and 28 percent didn't know.

(U) Both results are highly favorable to the program, but the respondents were less enthusiastic about the ralliers themselves. In the October 1971 and August 1972 polls, 1,956 rural respondents were asked: "Do you trust Hoi Chanh?"<sup>(55)</sup> This time, only 17 percent replied with an unqualified yes, while an additional 23 percent would "only trust those Hoi Chanh who showed their good will." Thirty-four percent would "trust, but their actions should be watched," and 8 percent wouldn't trust them at all.

#### KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CHIEU HOI PROGRAM\*

(U) The key elements of the Chieu Hoi Program were the inducements to rally and the rallier's reception, vocational training, resettlement, and follow-up. The latter three turned out to be the weakest parts of the program.

(U) Inducements took the form of psychological operations and rewards to persuade the VC/NVA to rally to the government. The psychological warfare material focused on the potential rallier's grievances, emotions, and aspirations, not—except for hard-core Viet Cong Infrastructure or North Vietnamese—on ideological commitment. Information about the program reached potential ralliers through a variety of channels: leaflets dropped from aircraft or distributed by hand, newspapers, aerial loudspeaker broadcasts, radio, tv, movies, family influence, and contact with ralliers. The leaflet proved to be an effective Chieu Hoi appeal, and a multilingual "Safe Conduct Pass" blanketed South Vietnam. Ralliers

described it as the best-known appeal and the one most conducive to rallying. After one engagement, 90 percent of the VC/NVA searched afterward were carrying it, despite the risk of punishment if their leaders caught them with the passes.

(U) Two kinds of cash rewards were employed to lure ralliers. The first rewarded Hoi Chanh who came in with a weapon or led government forces to weapons or weapon caches. The other rewarded people who induced a VC/NVA to surrender, and this was called the third-party inducement program. The weapons reward program was established in September 1964 and reaffirmed in 1967. By March 1970, the rewards ranged from VN \$1,200† for a hand weapon up to VN \$1 million for leading Allied troops to large VC/NVA weapons caches. Many large caches were found in this manner. The third-party inducement program began in the summer of 1967 in Military Region 4. The program paid rewards to any Vietnamese citizen or rallier who could get a VC/NVA to rally. It proved quite successful in raising the rallier counts, but corruption killed it off two years later. Before it ended, there were all sorts of schemes to collect the reward money. Too many ralliers turned out to have an "inducer" who had little or nothing to do with their decision to rally, and the government seemed to be getting little for its money.

(U) The rallier's reception at the Chieu Hoi Center was important. The inducement promises had to be fulfilled if the program was to remain effective. On arrival at the reception center the rallier was screened to determine his legitimacy as a defector. An interrogation to gain tactical intelligence followed, and then the rallier had to attend political lectures (usually mediocre at best), and he could receive vocational training, if he desired (few did). After 45 to 60 days, the rallier left the center as a free person with a military deferment for six months.

(U) Resettlement and employment of the Hoi Chanh after leaving the center was also important. Many ralliers volunteered for the government's military and paramilitary forces, and some found jobs in government agencies, particularly the

\*Except where noted, this entire section draws heavily on Koch, <sup>(48)</sup> pp. viii, ix, x, and 59 through 90.

†Approximately 10 U.S. dollars, at that time.



TABLE 126. *More than 200,000 VC/NVA rallied to the South Vietnamese Government; numbers in thousands.*  
(Table unclassified.)

	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total
VC/NVA Ralliers (In Thousands)	11	5	11	20	27	18	47	33	20	11	203

Source: Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) March 25, 1971 - January 17, 1973, pp. 1 through 7.

Chieu Hoi ministry. After 1969, Hoi Chanh were used increasingly as interrogators in the Phung Hoang program to neutralize the VC/NVA infrastructure. Resettlement of ralliers who did not join the military or the government was a problem, since employers were reluctant to hire Hoi Chanh because they didn't trust them.

(U) Follow-up of ralliers after they left the Chieu Hoi Center was not effective, and there was no system to do this until late 1971, when an automated tracking system under the National Police was established. Thus, an assessment of the ralliers' economic, political, and social activities is not possible.

HOW MANY RALLIED, AND WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

(U) The VC/NVA rallied for personal, not ideological, reasons. With few exceptions, the growing pressure of Allied military efforts, hardship, war-weariness, uncertainty about the future, doubts

TABLE 127. *More than half of the ralliers were from Military Region 4. (Table unclassified.)*

In Thousands	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
MR 1	1.2	1.7	2.5	3.1	6.0	4.6	1.2	20.3
MR 2	2.3	9.1	7.2	1.9	3.2	2.5	2.3	28.5
MR 3	2.7	3.7	8.0	2.8	8.1	5.9	2.9	34.1
MR 4	4.9	5.7	9.4	10.4	29.8	19.7	13.9	93.8
Total	11.1	20.2	27.1	18.2	47.1	32.7	20.3	176.7

Sources: For 1965, 1966, and 1967, Koch, J. A., The Chieu Hoi Program In South Vietnam, 1963-1971, RAND Report R-1172-ARPA, January 1973, p. 111.

For 1968-1971, Table 4, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), October 22, 1970 and February 11, 1972, pp. 1 and 2.

about the VC/NVA ability to take over South Vietnam, disillusionment with VC/NVA policies and promises, and family concern all went into decisions to rally.<sup>(48)</sup> The Chieu Hoi Program was their escape hatch.

(U) Table 126 shows that, in the ten years from 1963 through 1972, more than 200,000 VC/NVA personnel surrendered to the government through the Chieu Hoi Program. The table indicates a buildup to a peak in 1969, when 47,000 ralliers came in, followed by a steady decline to 1972, when 11,000 came in, matching the 1965 level.

(U) Tables 127 and 128 show where the ralliers surrendered. Table 127 says that more than half

TABLE 128. *Eleven provinces accounted for half of the ralliers. (Table unclassified.)*

Provinces	1965-1971
Binh Dinh (MR 2)	10,627
Kien Hoa (MR 4)	9,672
An Xuyen (MR 4)	9,083
Kien Giang (MR 4)	8,844
Phong Dinh (MR 4)	8,393
Vinh Long (MR 4)	7,983
Chuong Thien (MR 4)	7,009
Dinh Tuong (MR 4)	6,783
Long An (MR 3)	6,698
Quang Tin (MR 1)	6,146
Phu Yen (MR 2)	6,025
Province Total	87,263 (49%)
Countrywide Total	176,756

Source: Koch, J. A., Ref. 48, p. 111.



TABLE 129. *The Chieu Hoi rate remained fairly stable the year around; monthly averages for 1965 through 1972. (Table unclassified.)*

	Hoi Chanh <u>a/</u>		Hoi Chanh <u>a/</u>
Jan	1701	1st Quarter	1975
Feb	1853		
Mar	2371		
Apr	1872	2nd Quarter	1791
May	1879		
Jun	1622		
Jul	2027	3rd Quarter	1924
Aug	2005		
Sep	1739		
Oct	2102	4th Quarter	2086
Nov	2267		
Dec	1891		

BUT WHEN THE COMBAT CYCLE WAS HIGH, THE CHIEU HOI RATE WAS LOW

<u>Allied Combat Deaths<sup>b/</sup></u> (Monthly Averages 1966-1972)			<u>Chieu Hoi <sup>a/</sup></u> (Monthly Averages 1965-1972)	
Feb - June	2967	High	Low	1919
Jul	2097	Low	High	2027
Aug - Sep	2330	High	Low	1872
Oct - Jan	2001	Low	High	1990

a/ Source: Table 2, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), March 25, 1971 - January 17, 1973, pp. 1 through 7.

b/ See Chapter II.

of them rallied in Military Region 4, doubtless because the VC/NVA troops were mostly VC and not NVA. Table 128 indicates that 11 provinces accounted for half of the ralliers in the period from 1965 through 1971. As expected, seven of the leaders are in Military Region 4.

(U) Military Region 1 produced only 11 percent of the ralliers. The low rate is not surprising, because Military Region 1 was right next to North Vietnam, and a high proportion of the VC/NVA troops operating in the area comprised NVA troop units or NVA fillers in Viet Cong units. Few NVA troops rallied anywhere in the country.

(U) Military Region 2 accounted for 16 percent of the ralliers. This was a respectable showing, but the interesting question is why Military Region 2 was able to produce 35 percent of all the Hoi Chanh in the country during 1966-67. The results dropped sharply after 1967. Part of the answer may lie in the saturation of the Military Region 2 populated areas (Binh Dinh and Phu Yen) with Allied forces, particularly the Koreans. They entered Military Region 2 in October 1965, and their operating areas produced unusually large numbers of Hoi Chanh.<sup>(56)</sup> Intelligence reports and rallier comments indicated that the VC/NVA

had an obsession with what it believed to be the unpredictable brutality of the Koreans. Part of the reaction probably stemmed from the Koreans' use of fear to induce ralliers. A psychological operations worker would tell families living in VC/NVA areas that they should influence their men to rally because future operations would kill all Viet Cong soldiers in given areas.<sup>(56)</sup>

(U) Military Region 3 accounted for 19 percent of the ralliers, and showed a fairly consistent performance, following the countrywide trends each year.

(U) Military Region 4 was far and away the leader in ralliers, accounting for more than half of them and being the leader in every year except 1966, when Military Region 2 was doing so well. Military Region 4 had only about 40 percent of the Viet Cong combat forces.<sup>(57)</sup> Why did it do so well? The Chieu Hoi program in Military Region 4 took off in 1968, when the region accounted for 57 percent of all Hoi Chanh that year, and it never fell below 60 percent after that. Two reasons for its success were that few NVA troops were present in Military Region 4 and the Chieu Hoi Program there was managed well. A more important reason was the increased Allied pressure after the 1968 Tet offensive. For example, Hoi Chanh in Vinh Long province began to complain during 1968 about the effectiveness of Allied military operations, which reportedly destroyed 20 percent of the guerrilla forces in Vinh Long and caused 5 percent of them to rally.<sup>(58)</sup> In 1969, Allied pressure intensified,<sup>(57)</sup> and the percentage of "secure" population in Military Region 4 jumped from 38 percent in 1968 to 64 percent in 1969.\* Progress continued until the 1972 offensive. For example, the rallier rate in Kien Hoa province rose sharply in 4th quarter 1970, accounting for 62 percent of the Military Region 4 ralliers. This was the result of GVN forces opening up Viet Cong strongholds and erecting permanent GVN outposts there.<sup>(59)</sup> Another reason for the large numbers of ralliers reported in Military Region 4 was the Third-Party Inducement Program, which began in Vinh Binh and Vinh Long Provinces during the summer of 1967.<sup>(60)</sup> During the first six months of 1969,

\*See Table 78 in Chapter XIII.



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TABLE 130. *Sixty percent of the ralliers were military. (Table unclassified.)*

Type of Rallier (In thousands)	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Military	7.9	12.9	17.7	12.6	28.4	17.1	10.9	107.5
Political	2.6	6.3	7.9	3.8	12.6	11.4	6.6	51.2
Other <u>a/</u>	<u>.6</u>	<u>1.0</u>	<u>1.6</u>	<u>1.8</u>	<u>6.0</u>	<u>4.1</u>	<u>2.8</u>	<u>17.9</u>
Total	11.1	20.2	27.2	18.2	47.0	32.7	20.3	176.6

Sources: For 1965: "Chieu Hoi: VC/NVA In 1968", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, February 1969, p. 31.

For 1966-1971: Koch, J. A., The Chieu Hoi Program in South Viet-Nam 1963-1971, R-112-ARPA, The RAND Corporation, January 1973, p. 11.

a/ Includes dissidents, followers, draft dodgers, deserters, porters, etc., who actively supported the VC/NVA.

seventy-five percent of the Military Region 4 ralliers were attributed to this program.<sup>(60)</sup> Later, some of them were reclassified as refugees or impressed laborers, or they turned out to be party to false inducement practices,<sup>(61)</sup> but still, even allowing for inflation of the figures, the flow was large.<sup>(57)</sup>

#### WHEN DID THEY RALLY?

(U) Table 129 shows that the Chieu rate remained fairly stable throughout the year. The lowest month, on average, was June (1,622), the highest, March (2,371). January and February are the months in which the Vietnamese lunar New Year, or Tet, usually occurs, and every year intensive efforts were made to induce VC/NVA to rally at Tet. But January and February did not attract high numbers of Chieu Hoi, on average, although March is the top month. The performance in March may be due to some spillover from the Tet campaign. Another possible explanation is that the tempo of combat usually picks up in February, and the potential ralliers may know that heavy fighting will continue until June and they simply decide not to endure it, and so they rally in March. Also, as they emerge from the isolation of their base areas to enter combat, this may give them their first opportunity to defect in a long time.

(U) The combat cycle, expressed in Allied combat deaths, had some impact on the flow of Hoi Chanh, as shown in Table 129. *The high periods*

*of the war cycle had low Chieu Hoi rates, and the low periods had high rates, although the differences between high and low Chieu Hoi rates was not great.*

#### WHO RALLIED?

(U) A detailed study of 20,000 returnees from July 1965 through June 1967 gave a fairly complete profile of the Hoi Chanh for that period.<sup>(62)</sup> About two-thirds (66 percent) of the ralliers were military, but the civilian proportion tended to increase when the rate increased. About 40 percent of the Hoi Chanh were village and hamlet guerrillas, 20 percent were civilian defectors from party organizations, 10 to 20 percent were regular military personnel, and the remaining 25 percent defected from militia, com-mo-liasion units, liberation associations, labor groups, etc. The proportion of cadre in the Hoi Chanh ranged from 15 to 19 percent, indicating little difference between cadre and rank-and-file defection trends during the two years. Senior cadre\* accounted for 5 to 8 percent of the ralliers.

(U) A majority of the Hoi Chanh were 16 to 30 years old. Generally, the higher the rallier's unit, the lower his average age; guerrillas were usually older than main-force troops, for example. Military Hoi Chanh from Military Regions 3 and 4

\*Assistant platoon leader and above for regular military forces; assistant unit leader and up for guerrillas and militia.



TABLE 131. *Military Regions 3 and 4 had a higher proportion of military Hoi Chanh than Military Regions 1 and 2, where the NVA forces were prevalent. (Table unclassified.)*

Military Region (1967-71)		No.	%		
		(000)		No.	%
				(000)	
<u>MR 1</u>					
Military		8.8	51	17.9	65
Political		7.0	40	5.7	20
Other		1.6	9	4.1	15
<u>MR 2</u>					
Military		7.6	45	52.4	63
Political		6.9	40	22.8	27
Other		2.6	15	8.0	10
<u>MR 3</u>					
<u>MR 4</u>					

Sources: For 1967: "Chieu Hoi: A Quarterly Report", SEA Analysis Rpt., April 1968, p. 8. For 1968-1971: Table 4, SEA Statistical Summary, Office of the Asst. Sec. Def. (Comptroller), Oct. 22, 1970 and Feb. 11, 1972, pp. 1-2.

were older and had longer service than those from Military Regions 1 and 2. Cadre were generally older than their followers, and a majority of the ralliers had 12 or more months of VC/NVA service. Less than 15 percent were GVN deserters or had served the GVN before joining the VC/NVA.

(U) The Hoi Chanh may have represented only a partial manpower loss to the VC/NVA, because most of them came from Viet Cong villages and wanted to return home. A few (0.5 percent) were defecting for the second time. A much higher percentage probably faced further service with the Viet Cong if they went home, and late in the war they might be executed if they returned to VC/NVA areas.

(U) The study indicated that it was tougher to defect from regular force units than from other VC/NVA organizations. The proportion of defectors from regular forces in the sample was about half of the proportion of regular forces in the total VC/NVA strength. The percentage of guerrilla and civilian ralliers was greater than their share of VC/NVA strength. One interpretation of the difference is that few regular force troops are able to defect, while another is that the strengths of guerrilla and civilian units were underestimated. Evidence exists to bolster either case.

(U) Table 130 shows that 60 percent of the Hoi Chanh came from military units of one sort or another, and 30 percent were from the VC/NVA political structure. Approximately 1,200 NVA

troops rallied, or 1 percent of the military total<sup>(63)</sup> through 1971.

(U) Table 131 shows the pattern by military region. Military Hoi Chanh predominated in the southern part of the country (Military Regions 3 and 4) where Viet Cong forces were prevalent. Further north, (Military Regions 1 and 2) where NVA forces predominated, the military Hoi Chanh accounted for only half of the total.

## HOI CHANH HELPED THE GVN

(U) Many Hoi Chanh decided to work with the GVN after their release from the Chieu Hoi Center. Some worked as interrogators in the Phung Hoang program to neutralize the VCI. Others volunteered to serve with GVN military or paramilitary forces. Hoi Chanh were particularly effective in two special roles, the Armed Propaganda Teams and the Kit Carson Scouts.

(U) The Armed Propaganda Teams were lightly armed paramilitary units that became the primary action arm of the Chieu Hoi ministry for face-to-face inducement of potential ralliers in VC/NVA areas. The teams would go into VC/NVA-controlled or contested areas as former Viet Cong who had seen the light and would tell the people how to rally. The teams also assisted the National Police as interrogators and helped identify Viet Cong trying to pass through GVN check points. They helped train the PSDF, and five-man lecture teams visited schools, business groups, and military camps.

(U) "Kit Carson Scouts" were Hoi Chanh who volunteered to serve with U.S. and third-nation units in combat. They usually served in their home areas and were helpful because they knew how and where the VC/NVA units operated. By the end of 1968, 1,500 Scouts were deployed with U.S. and third-nation units all over the country.<sup>(64)</sup>

## VC/NVA REACTION

(U) The VC/NVA reaction to the Chieu Hoi program ranged from propaganda to attacks on Chieu Hoi centers, and it increased as the program continued to induce defectors from the VC/NVA political and military units. At first, the VC/NVA regarded Hoi Chanh who had simply passed through the Chieu Hoi Center as misguided



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brothers to be given a second chance.<sup>(62)</sup> However, if the rallier had turned his weapons in or had helped the GVN by locating VC/NVA weapons and supplies or by furnishing intelligence, he was to be killed.

(U) By 1970, the VC/NVA leadership was disturbed enough to announce that anyone who killed a returnee would become a member of the Order of the Valiant Knights. Up to this point, the honor had been reserved for VC/NVA personnel who had killed at least ten Vietnamese and American soldiers.<sup>(65)</sup> A captured VC/NVA document assessed the program in April 1971:

The trend of defection continued to increase . . . The defections among the local force and guerrilla elements were critical. . . . In some districts, half of the local guerrillas joined the enemy. . . . Mass defections were also recorded among troop units and included battalion and company political cadres.<sup>(66)</sup>

Efforts were made to prevent knowledge of the Chieu Hoi Program from reaching the VC/NVA troops, but they were not successful, given the flood of leaflets and the growing word-of-mouth news about the program. Propaganda leaflets and safe-conduct passes were quickly gathered up and burned. Attempts were made to interfere with broadcasts from aircraft, and VC/NVA propaganda stressed the "torture and mistreatment" that awaited the person who tried to rally to the GVN. After the defection of a high-ranking cadre (few defected), the political cadres subjected their people to thorough reindoctrination.

(U) The danger of infiltration is inherent in any defector program, and the Chieu Hoi Program was no exception. Evidence of false ralliers appeared first in April 1967.<sup>(56)</sup> By late 1970 and early 1971, recurring evidence suggested a coordinated VC/NVA strategy for infiltration of the Chieu Hoi Centers, wherein the agent would rally and then join a local paramilitary force. Thirty-one RF/PF outposts were overrun in the spring of 1971, compared to nine during the same period the year before, with indications of collusion between some of the false ralliers in the outposts and the VC/NVA forces outside.<sup>(67)</sup> Evidence also suggests that the VC/NVA used the Chieu Hoi Program to secure legitimacy for some of its people as the

cease-fire approached. However, no evidence of widespread infiltration was found, despite a program of surveillance and interrogation directed at spotting such cases.<sup>(68)</sup>

(U) *All factors considered, the VC/NVA reactions to the Chieu Hoi Program suggests that it caused them real problems.*

## CONCLUSIONS

(U) *The Chieu Hoi Program probably had the most favorable cost/benefit ratio of any GVN program in South Vietnam. The cost of bringing in 27,789 ralliers from 1963 through 1965 was \$14 apiece.<sup>(69)</sup> By 1966, the cost was up to \$150 per rallier,<sup>(70)</sup> and by 1969 it had leveled off at \$350.<sup>(71)</sup> Contrast this with the \$60,000 it cost to kill a VC/NVA soldier during fiscal 1969 in a main force operation.\**

(U) *More important, the Chieu Hoi Program removed VC/NVA from their military forces at no direct cost in Allied casualties. During 1963-72, more than 200,000 returnees surrendered to the GVN, and approximately 60 percent, or 120,000 of them, came from military units. Meanwhile, 890,000 VC/NVA troops were reportedly killed. Thus, the military Chieu Hoi total is equivalent to approximately 14 percent of the VC/NVA combat deaths. During the same period, the Allied forces lost 235,000 killed in action, or 0.27 killed for each VC/NVA killed. By extrapolation, it would have cost 32,000 Allied KIA to kill the 120,000 VC/NVA troops, if they hadn't rallied.*

(U) This calculation shouldn't be taken too seriously, because many Hoi Chanh were driven to defect by the pressure of Allied military operations and because such calculations ignore the complexity of the factors at work. *But it does serve to make the point that, by any standards and by any calculation, the Chieu Hoi Program furnished a low-cost escape hatch for VC/NVA defectors and thereby generated high benefits for low costs.*

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\*Nine billion dollars cost of U.S. and RVNAF main-force operations in fiscal 1969 divided by the 155,727 VC/NVA reportedly killed in fiscal 1969. Cost data are from Table 7 of Chapter III. KIA data from Table 6, *Southeast Asia Statistical Summary*, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller).



## Chapter XVII

### How Well Was the Viet Cong Politico-Military Apparatus Dismantled?

(U) The Communist's subversive political-military apparatus in South Vietnam was often called the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI). It was the clandestine organization that not only commanded most VC/NVA operations, but directed the flow of manpower, supplies, and intelligence to local VC/NVA forces and conducted much of the terrorism and other actions against the populace and local GVN officials. Many VCI simultaneously held military commands. This chapter discusses (1) the official estimates of VCI strength and where it was concentrated, (2) the Phung Hoang (or Phoenix) campaign against the VCI, (3) what the Vietnamese thought of the campaign, and (4) its probable impact on the VCI.

#### VCI STRENGTH AND LOCATION

(U) As indicated in Chapter IV, order-of-battle estimating techniques didn't work very well to estimate the strength of the VCI, because it was not organized in military units, but in a hierarchical structure common to clandestine organizations, with many members operating on their own. The CORDS organization in MACV, in cooperation with the intelligence community and the police, attempted to estimate the numbers and types of VCI by adopting techniques used by police everywhere to compile lists of persons wanted for crimes. The British in Malaya used the techniques, which called for a description of the clandestine organizations and then attempted to find out who filled the positions in them. Since the techniques and the intelligence on which

they were based were often ambiguous, the numbers presented here should be taken as orders of magnitude—nothing more.

(U) Table 132 indicates that the estimated VCI strength declined gradually between August 1967 and October 1971, by 22 percent. However, the reporting system changed in November 1970, so the October figure is not strictly comparable to the earlier figures.<sup>(72)</sup> Comparable data, if available, would probably show a larger decline.

(U) More interesting than the estimates of strength are the estimates of VCI presence that can be obtained from questions about the status of the VCI found in the HES (Hamlet Evaluation System) and the PAAS (Pacification Attitude Analysis System), although these estimates are tenuous, too. In July 1969, the HES reported that 74 percent of the population were subjected to the covert activity of the VCI and another 5 percent were under its control.<sup>(73)</sup> Only 18 percent of the population reportedly was free of VCI influence. By June 1971, the figure had risen to 32 percent. By comparison, the PAAS data for June 1971 suggest that only 14 percent of the respondents lived in an area where no VCI cadre were present. Another 14 percent said VCI cadre were present but ineffective.<sup>(74)</sup> Adding these two figures yields fairly good agreement (28 percent) with the 32 percent from the HES data applied to the urban as well as rural population, and it can be expected to show a higher percentage free of the VCI. The PAAS in this case applied only to the rural population, where the VCI presence ought to be



TABLE 132. *The VCI estimated strength dropped 22 percent; figures in thousands. (Table unclassified.)*

1967 (U)		1968 (U)	1969 (C)	1970 (C)	1971 (C)
Aug	Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec	Oct
85	84	83	74	72	66

Sources: "Phoenix Program: 1970 Results", SEA Analysis Rpt., September-October 1970, p. 20.

"Phoenix", SEA Analysis Report, June-July 1971, p. 2.

MACV Measurement of Progress Report, December 1971, p. 67.

stronger, and the PAAS is more conservative than HES as a general rule. At any rate, both sets of data suggest that, as late as June 1971, the Viet Cong clandestine cadre were conducting some activities among two-thirds of the South Vietnamese population.

(U) Data for March 1971 indicate that more than half of the estimated VCI strength was found in 13 provinces of South Vietnam.<sup>(75)</sup> The map (Fig. 15) suggests that the situation in those areas was more serious than the numbers alone would indicate, because 11 of the 13 provinces formed three contiguous groups. The grouping suggests pockets of strength and the ability to provide mutual support and operating flexibility. (The pattern of the map is not totally unfamiliar; see Chapter II).

### THE PHUNG HOANG (PHOENIX) PROGRAM

(U) Defeating a flexible, clandestine organization such as the VCI requires more than a purely military effort. Ideally, it demands the type of multilevel, coordinated counterespionage organization that the British developed so well during the Malayan emergency. By contrast, the South Vietnamese counterespionage effort was splintered, badly led, poorly financed, and understaffed.

(U) Throughout the Vietnam War, indeed from 1954 on, the GVN tried to get at the VCI, but its efforts were so uncoordinated, diffused, and feeble as to have little impact. In 1967, the Phung Hoang Program was established in an attempt to remedy some of the shortcomings. The basic concept was to enlist and coordinate the efforts of local leaders, police, and paramilitary groups to identify and dismantle the VCI.

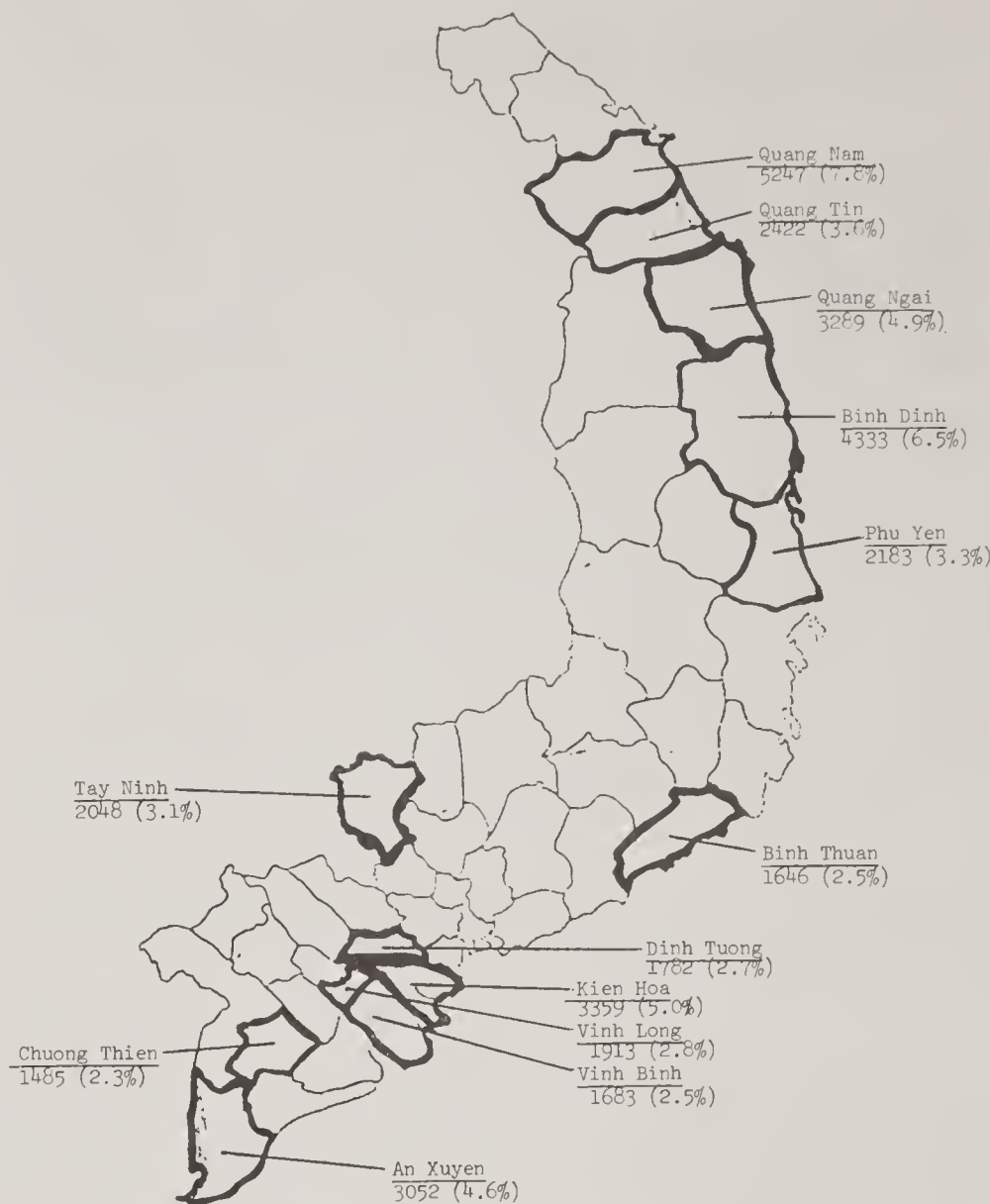


Figure 15. Provinces having high strengths in Viet Cong infrastructure. (Figure classified Confidential.)

(U) *The Phung Hoang Program itself was not intended to be the actual instrument of neutralizing the VCI.* It was only supposed to coordinate the efforts of district and province intelligence operations coordinating committees (DIOCC's and PIOCC's) in identifying the local VCI cadre and planning operations against them. These committees in turn were coordinating bodies. In addition to a full-time National Police staff, they included village council chairmen, village commissioners, hamlet chiefs, and others as *ex officio* members. Peoples Self Defense Force (PSDF) group leaders and other paramilitary personnel also participated. Phung Hoang was a *Vietnamese* program, although this coordinating effort was pressed on them by the Americans. The U.S. role was to provide advisory support, predominately technical advice, and very limited logistical help.

(U) Once plans were developed and VCI cadre identified, the operations were carried out by various Vietnamese forces. They included the National Police, the Field Police, Special Police, RVNAF Military Security Teams, Armed Propaganda Teams, Census Grievance Cadre, RD



TABLE 133. Viet Cong Infrastructure taken out of action. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1968 <sup>a/</sup>	1969 <sup>a/</sup>	1970 <sup>a/</sup>	1971 <sup>a/</sup>	1972 <sup>a,b/</sup>
Yearly Total (000)	15.8	19.5	21.1	18.0	12.0 (est.)
Monthly Average	1315	1628	1763	1528	1047

Sources: "Phoenix Program: 1970 Results", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, September-October 1970, p. 23.

"Phoenix", Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1971, p. 2.

MACV Measurement of Progress Report, December 1971, p. 68.

<sup>a/</sup> 1968 and 1969 figures include all VCI killed, rallied, or captured, whether sentenced or not. 1970-72 figures included all VCI killed, rallied, or sentenced.

<sup>b/</sup> 1972 figure is based on January-August data only, which averaged 1047 per month for that eight month period.

Cadre, Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), and RVNAF forces.

(U) The Phung Hoang Program was supposed to be directed at high-ranking VCI cadre. The program was to focus its greatest efforts against executive cadre at all levels of the VCI organization and to concentrate special attention on members of the National Liberation Councils and Committees, finance-economy cadre of the People's Revolutionary Party, and members of National Alliances for Democracy and Peace. The goal suffered greatly in the application. In practice, well over half of all VCI neutralized were nonparty members (although the party was very small, so this result was no surprise), and three-quarters operated at the village-level or lower.

## RESULTS

(U) The objective was to dismantle the VCI. By January 1970, this was measured as all VCI killed, rallied, or sentenced. Persons captured, but not yet convicted and sentenced, did not count in the official totals. The sentencing proviso was not required before January 1970.<sup>(76)</sup> Under the previous definition, VCI taken out of action included all VCI captured, whether sentenced or not. By this definition, 15,800 and 19,500 VCI were taken out of action in 1968 and 1969, respectively (Table 133). Since VCI taken into custody were not always tried or sentenced, and since prisons were known to leak captives almost as rapidly as they received them, this definition clearly led to inflated figures for those years. Under

TABLE 134. Viet Cong Infrastructure neutralization by echelon and party membership; totals and percent. (Table classified Confidential.)

	Jan 1970 - Mar 1971	
	Number	Percent
<u>Province, Saigon, Region, and COSVN</u>		
Full or Probationary Party Member	769	3
Other	1,030	4
Subtotal	1,799	7
<u>District</u>		
Full or Probationary Party Member	1,932	7
Other	2,318	8
Subtotal	4,250	15
<u>City</u>		
Full or Probationary Party Member	149	-
Other	279	1
Subtotal	428	1
<u>Village and Hamlet</u>		
Full or Probationary Party Member	9,070	33
Other	11,877	43
Subtotal	20,947	76
<u>All Levels</u>		
Full or Probationary Party Member	11,920	43
Other	15,504	57
Total Neutralized	27,424	100

the new definition, about 21,000 VCI were reported out of action in 1970 and 18,000 in 1971, but even these numbers are not precise. *About 60 percent of the 1971 figure came from the 13 provinces where the VCI were concentrated.*<sup>(72)</sup>

(U) The real problems of Phung Hoang effectiveness began to appear when the *quality* of the VCI taken out of action was examined. The purpose of the program was to dismantle the driving force behind the VC/NVA forces, namely, the party leaders operating at the top of the structure. However, in 1970 and 1971 (through March) less than 3 percent of the VCI killed, captured, or rallied were full or probationary party members above the district level.<sup>(72)</sup> In 1970, the six most important VCI taken out of action were:<sup>(72)</sup>

- A chief, Cadre Affairs Section, Peoples Revolutionary Party (PRP) (captured August 1970);
- A deputy chief, Military Proselyting Section, PRP (rallied May 1970);
- A chief, Documentation Subsection (Espionage/Intelligence), Security Section PRP (captured February 1970);
- A deputy detention chief, Interrogation/Detention Subsection (POW and Detention Camps), Security Section, PRP (rallied December 1970); and



TABLE 135. Vietnamese action forces versus targeting; totals and percent. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1970		1971 (through March)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Kills and Captures				
by Phung Hoang Forces:				
Specific Targeting	2,806	11	648	9
General Targeting	2,692	10	833	12
Subtotal	5,498	21	1,481	21
by Military Forces:				
Specific Targeting	2,622	10	1,179	16
General Targeting	10,354	40	2,254	32
Subtotal	12,976	50	3,433	48
Rallies (Chieu Hoi)	7,562	29	2,194	31
TOTAL	26,036	100	7,108	100

Source: "Phoenix," Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1971, p. 5.

TABLE 136. Only 2 percent of the VCI taken out of action were specifically targeted and killed by Phung Hoang Forces in the period from January 1970 through March 1971. (Table classified Confidential.)

	Specific Targeting	General Targeting	Total
VCI Killed			
Force Responsible:			
Military	2,267	6,885	9,152
Phung Hoang	616	675	1,291
Total Killed	2,883	7,560	10,443
VCI Captured	4,372	8,573	12,945
VCI Rallied	N/A	N/A	9,756
Grand Total	7,255	16,133	33,144

Source: "Phoenix," Southeast Asia Analysis Report, June-July 1971, p. 6.

- A deputy chief, Rear Service Section, PRP, (captured October 1970).

(U) Table 134 shows that three out of four people killed, captured, or defected in both 1970 and early 1971 were from the lowest levels of the organization—village or hamlet—and the majority of these were not party members. Although not shown in the table, the pattern continued throughout 1971 and may have been the norm for the program.<sup>(77)</sup> The effect at the village and hamlet level cannot be dismissed as unimportant, because it made it more difficult for the VCI to operate and recruit. The impact at low levels was probably the most successful aspect of the program.

(U) The inability of Phung Hoang to go to the heart of the VC/NVA control organization can be explained by looking at which GVN forces were most effective and under what circumstances.

TABLE 137. The backlog of VCI cases exceeded 2,000. (Table classified Confidential.)

	1970				1971
	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr
Captured in Period	2,301	3,105	2,477	2,483	2,581
Cases Acted Upon					
Sentenced	432	1,480	1,841	1,736	1,735
Released	85	223	440	356	356
Transferred a/	28	205	428	213	248
Unaccounted for	0	0	313	473	138
Total	545	1,908	3,022	2,778	2,477
Backlog at End of Quarter	1,756	2,953	2,408	2,113	2,217

MOST VCI SENTENCES (70%) WERE FOR LESS THAN 2 YEARS, BUT COULD BE EXTENDED

Length of Sentence b/					
0-6 months	54	109	178	131	107
6-12 months	86	198	234	203	148
12-24 months	168	702	841	882	933
Over 24 months	124	471	588	520	547
Total	432	1,480	1,841	1,736	1,735

Source: "Phoenix," SEA Analysis Report, June-July, 1971, p. 7.

- a/ To military or civil court, to another province, drafted, classified as "POW" or listed as "other".
- b/ Initial sentence only. Sentence could subsequently be extended by administrative action of the Province Security Committee.

Phung Hoang forces\* accounted for only just over 20 percent of all VCI killed, captured, or rallied and only half of their results (9 percent of the total) were the result of specific targeting. Military forces killed or captured about half the VCI taken, and the remaining 30 percent rallied through the Chieu Hoi Program.† In short, only ten percent of the job was being done in an organized way by the forces chiefly tasked to do it (Table 135). In earlier years this percentage was even lower.

(U) Detailed data (not shown here) indicate that the territorial forces (RF/PF), especially in Military Regions 1 and 4, accounted for the largest share of VCI killed or captured by a single force (1970, 50 percent; early 1971, 39 percent). Police brought in 20 percent in 1970 and 14 percent in early 1971. On a man-for-man basis, the single most effective anti-VCI force was the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU). This 4,400-man force killed or captured 1,683 VCI in 1970, about 380 for every thousand men in the force; in early 1971 they were capturing and killing VCI at an annual rate of 263 per thousand. No other force came close to this. The police (about 109,000 strong in 1971) killed or captured only about 40 VCI per 1,000 per year;

\*National Police, Field Police, Special Police, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, RD Cadre, Census Grievance teams, Armed Propaganda teams.

†The VCI who rallied may or may not have reduced VC/NVA effectiveness. The tactic of legitimizing cadre by rallying became a goal of the VCI late in war. See Chapter XVI for an analysis of the Chieu Hoi Program.



## CONFIDENTIAL

RF/PF about 20 per 1,000 per year. (The PRU were later incorporated into the special branch of the National Police.)

(U) Critics of the Phung Hoang Program have asserted that it was used more as a convenient way to assassinate political enemies than to dismantle the VCI. But Table 136 shows that, during the 15 months from January 1970 through March 1971, *less than 2 percent of all VCI put out of action were specifically targeted and killed by Phung Hoang forces. Most of the VCI were either killed or captured as a by-product of military operations, or as a result of general screening operations, and were identified as VCI afterwards.* There is no way of telling from the data whether any political assassinations were taking place, but the data do suggest that such activity was not the primary aim of the program. Indeed, if the VC/NVA were worried about the Phung Hoang Program, and there are reports that they were, they could do worse than to label Phung Hoang a political assassination program. In short, the numbers alone will not answer the allegations of political assassinations, but they won't support them either.

(U) Until January 1970 there was no system to provide follow-up on persons captured as suspected VCI. It was impossible to determine systematically whether captured persons were ever processed by the Province Security Committee and sentenced or released. To remedy this situation, an information system (VCINIS) was started in January 1970. It assigned an identification (ID) number to each detainee on the basis of his name, birthdate, and time and place of capture. Data on the individual's processing and sentence or release were entered into the system at a later date, keyed to the ID number assigned.<sup>(78)</sup>

(U) Another difficulty the GVN faced in dismantling the VCI was its own cumbersome and leaky judicial machinery. Despite American pleas to upgrade the judicial machinery, Table 137 shows that after a data base was established during the first quarter of 1970, the backlog of cases consistently exceeded 2,000. During the last three quarters of the period, the backlog was reduced by an increase in the number of persons released after trial, transferred out of the system, or unaccounted for. The table indicates that most sentences were for less than two years, but they

could be extended by administrative action of the Province Security Committee.

(U) The South Vietnamese people clearly sensed the shortcomings of the system for trying VCI suspects. When asked about the treatment given to VCI when they were arrested or captured, 6,298 respondents in a series of PAAS rural surveys responded as follows:<sup>(79)</sup> Usually fair and just, 56 percent; sometimes fair and just, 17 percent; usually unfair and unjust, 10 percent; don't know, 33 percent. When asked if the judicial proceedings for the VCI should be made public, more than half of the 4,444 respondents to this question answered yes (53 percent). Only 17 percent said no, and 29 percent did not know.<sup>(80)</sup>

### WHAT DID THE VIETNAMESE THINK OF THE PHUNG HOANG PROGRAM?

(U) Awareness of the Phung Hoang Program increased steadily from January 1970 through August 1972, the period for which data are available.<sup>(81)</sup> Even though efforts were made to publicize the program, 67 percent of the respondents to a PAAS rural survey in January 1970 said they did not know what the words Phung Hoang meant. By August 1972, only 26 percent said they were not aware of the Phung Hoang program. The question was changed in March 1971 and this may have affected the figures, but the trend seems clear; more people became aware of the program as time passed.

(U) But the level of awareness was not high. The PAAS rural surveys asked 6,431 people during 1971 and 1972 whether they were aware of the Phung Hoang Program. Only 8 percent said they clearly understood the program. Thirty-two percent said they had a general idea of it, and another 32 percent said they had heard the name.<sup>(82)</sup>

(U) Some clues to the attitude of the Vietnamese rural population toward the Phung Hoang Program are furnished by answers to questions about how much effort the National Police should devote to the VCI problem and whether rewards should be offered to the populace for information leading to the capture of VCI cadre. In 1971 and 1972, 5,556 respondents were asked: "How much effort should the National Police devote to dealing with the elimination of VCI?" Sixty-seven percent thought the police should spend at least half of



their time on the VCI.<sup>(83)</sup> When asked: "Should the GVN pay for information that leads to the capture of VCI cadre?" 73 percent of 945 respondents answered yes, 5 percent said no, and 22 percent didn't know.<sup>(84)</sup> But when asked if people would approve of those who provide information about Communist activities for money, only 49 percent of the same sample said yes, 15 percent said no, and 31 percent didn't know.<sup>(85)</sup>

(U) Taken as a whole, the data seem to suggest that a hard core of about 40 percent of the rural population knew something about the program, thought the police should really concentrate on it (more than half their time), and would approve of rewards to people who furnished information about Communist activities.

(U) When 2,170 respondents were asked about the performance of Phung Hoang in eliminating the VCI, only 30 percent thought the program was effective. Twenty-eight percent thought its performance was fairly effective because it helped force the VCI to modify, but not necessarily cease, its activities. Nine percent thought performance was poor, and 20 percent didn't know.<sup>(86)</sup> When 8,219 rural respondents were asked about the performance of the National Police in dealing with the VCI, only 28 percent thought the police were effective.<sup>(87)</sup> When asked: "Do village and district officials place emphasis on eliminating VC/VCI?" 55 percent of a sample of 5,464 replied: Yes, considerable.<sup>(88)</sup> A sample of 5,470 was then asked: "What do the majority of the people think of the village/district officials' efforts to eliminate the VC/VCI?" Fifty-seven percent said that their efforts were appreciated and had community support.<sup>(89)</sup>

(U) Taken as a whole, the data suggest that about 55 percent of the respondents to the questions thought that the program's performance was at least fairly effective and that local officials were emphasizing Phung Hoang with the support of the community.

## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE VCI?

(U) The HES and PAAS data give some clues to the status and effectiveness of the VCI by 1972 and are probably better indicators of the state of affairs than the order-of-battle approach presented

at the beginning of this analysis, although they, too, must be viewed with caution.

(U) The HES regularly asked a question each quarter about the status of the VCI in every hamlet. The results suggest that (1) the population living free of the VC/NVA infrastructure tripled between 1969 and 1972, with most of the progress made in 1971, and that by December 1972 fifty-five percent had reached this condition; (2) after 1969, the population subjected to the most intense VCI activity (regular covert activity or primary authority) leveled off at 8 to 10 percent of the total; and (3) still, at the end of 1972, forty-five percent of the population was reportedly subject to at least sporadic, covert activity by the Viet Cong Infrastructure.<sup>(90)</sup>

(U) The PAAS data, once again, were more conservative than the HES data, partly because they did not include the urban population. Only 23 percent of the respondents in 1972 said that there were no VCI cadre in the area or, if present, that they were ineffective.<sup>(91)</sup> The changes from 1971 to 1972 in the PAAS data show a pattern not unlike the HES, in that the "no VCI" category stayed about the same. However, 15 percent of the respondents rated the VCI *more* effective in 1972, compared to 4 percent in 1971, and only 34 percent rated the VCI as *less* effective in 1972, compared to 52 percent in 1971. The PAAS respondents clearly felt that the VCI recovered some lost ground in 1972.

(U) To be effective, the VCI had to be able to recruit new members. The HES didn't ask a specific question about the VCI ability to recruit, but it did ask whether any people in the hamlet lived where VCI recruiters, tax collectors, and other cadre could move freely at night.<sup>(92)</sup> Shown below is the growing percentage of the population which did *not* live in such areas:

Dec	Dec	Dec	Dec
1969	1970	1971	1972
56%	71%	80%	79%

The PAAS data are not sufficient to show a trend about recruiting; but in 1972, 3,475 rural respondents were asked: "Is the VCI presently able to recruit any new members in this village?"<sup>(93)</sup> Sixty percent answered no, 20 percent answered yes, and 19 percent did not know. Half



of those who answered yes said that the VCI could recruit only with great difficulty.

(U) Another criterion of VCI effectiveness was its ability to tax the population for funds to keep its organization and efforts going. The HES and the PAAS both asked about the VCI ability to tax. Again, a trend is available from the HES, but not from the PAAS. The HES asked if the VCI collected taxes from hamlet households, in cash or in kind. By December 1971, the answer was *no* for 82 percent of the population.<sup>(94)</sup> The PAAS rural survey asked 3,476 respondents in 1972: "Have VCI cadre been able to tax the people of this village in recent months?" Fifty-seven percent answered no, 19 percent said yes, a few times a month, 8 percent said the VCI taxed almost daily.<sup>(95)</sup> Again, the PAAS rural data were more conservative than the view from HES, which included the cities. The HES trend indicates that the VCI were collecting taxes from fewer people each year.

(U) A key facet of VCI effectiveness was to keep the identity of its members secret, particularly from the GVN. The HES asked: "Are the identities of members of the enemy infrastructure for this village known to friendly intelligence personnel?" The answers are interesting but troublesome, because they contradict some of the HES data presented above. As with the other data, the trends are favorable to the GVN, but these data from HES suggest that only 29 percent of the population in December 1972 lived where no VCI existed, in sharp contrast to the 55 percent figure from another HES question discussed above. No

explanation for the difference is readily available. The 55 percent version of the question asks about VCI in the *hamlets* and the 29 percent version asks about VCI in the *villages*. The village is an area like a township, and it includes hamlets within its borders, so on that basis the figures ought to agree. It may be significant that the 29-percent answer agrees well with the 23-percent answer from the PAAS presented earlier in this chapter. The PAAS rural survey asked 851 respondents in March 1971 if they were aware of the present Viet Cong village/hamlet officials (the HES asked if *GVN intelligence personnel* knew the identities of the VCI).<sup>(97)</sup> As might be expected (the VCI was supposed to be clandestine, and this could be a dangerous question to answer), most of them (68 percent) said they were not aware of the VCI officials. Another 24 percent said they were aware of a few of them.

## CONCLUSION

(U) The picture that emerges from the data is a VCI that was battered as a by-product of the war, rather than by an intense Phung Hoang effort, but still able to function among a significant portion of the South Vietnamese population in December 1972, just before the cease-fire. There is no evidence in the data of a Phung Hoang Program of systematic political assassinations, although people were specifically targeted and killed by Vietnamese action forces. Finally, the Phung Hoang Program was not very effective, but it seems to have been supported by a substantial portion of the South Vietnamese population.



## Chapter XVIII

### Refugee Problems

(U) Vietnamese Government records suggest that about 7 million people at one time or another were officially registered as refugees or war victims during 1965-72. Stated another way, a third of South Vietnam's population were official refugees or war victims at some point in time. Of course more than a million of these were people whose homes were destroyed or damaged by the Tet 1968 offensive, and they were not displaced from their area of residence.

(U) *Many people undoubtedly registered as refugees or war victims more than once.* For example, Military Region 1 was hit hard in the 1968 Tet offensive and, again, even harder in the 1972 offensive, long after most of the Tet 1968 refugees and war victims had returned to their homes. It seems reasonable to assume that many of the 1968 refugees and victims were caught in the 1972 offensive and registered for government assistance again, but no records exist to confirm it. On the other hand, others who were displaced or injured, or who suffered property damage from the war, never entered the official system for care and relief, so it is probably safe to assume that one-third of the population had been displaced by the war at one time or another.

(U) *This does not mean that 7 million people in South Vietnam were on the refugees or war victims rolls at the end of 1972. Most of them had passed through the system, received some benefits, and returned to their homes or resettled.* The number of refugees in December 1972 was probably down to less than a million, because the number living in official

refugee camps and receiving government assistance was 650,000; an estimated 450,000 displaced by the 1972 offensive had already returned home, and another 200,000 were believed to be living with relatives or otherwise caring for themselves.<sup>(98)</sup>

#### THE STATISTICS

(U) It is important to recognize the function and frailty of the refugee and war victim statistics, the function being to identify numbers of individuals to whom payments were due,<sup>(99)</sup> not to count all refugees and war victims in South Vietnam. The refugee and war victim counts were simply the key to distributing assistance to those who registered officially with the government.

(U) The statistics were a source of misunderstanding, because outside observers believed they represented the total number of refugees, while the officials working in the refugee program considered them to be the current number of refugees or war victims to whom payments were due. The nature of the figures meant that the case load might rise because of delays in paying benefits, even though the refugees might have found employment or returned to their homes. Or the case load might be too low because refugees weren't being registered, although many existed. To compound the problem, the statistics weren't reported with a great deal of accuracy. In 1967, U.S. Senate investigators asserted that ". . . nothing resembling even remotely accurate information on the numbers of refugees has been made available."<sup>(100)</sup> Although the reporting improved, Gen-



TABLE 138 *If you can get a higher paying job, but have to move to another province, would you accept this job? (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Yes	13%	23%
No	86%	76%
No. of Respondents	1919	2312

Source: PAAS Rural Question 422, asked in January and March 1972; Urban Question 5423, asked in January, February, March, and September 1972.

eral Accounting Office investigators more than two years later, observed:

Since February 1968 the refugee reporting system has undergone three major revisions but the information being reported is still conflicting, confusing, and inconsistent—in part, because it is compiled by untrained personnel.<sup>(101)</sup>

Despite their lack of precision, the refugee figures are fairly reliable in indicating the magnitude of the problem, and they did fluctuate with the tempo of the combat. When combat increased, so did the number of refugees. When it decreased, the number of refugees did too.

#### REFUGEES, WAR VICTIMS, AND MIGRANTS

(U) Three groups commonly called refugees are addressed here: war victims, migrants, and refugees. Refugees were people who were forced to move away from their homes and employment and who registered for government benefits. War victims were civilians who suffered property damage or personal injury from the war, but who did not have to leave their homes or employment for an extended period of time.<sup>(102)</sup> They also registered for government benefits. Most of the “refugees” from the Tet 1968 offensive were really *war victims*, as almost all remained in the same urban locales. Migrants, for the purpose of this paper, were the people who moved to the cities, not as refugees, but to get jobs. They did not register for government benefits.

#### MIGRANTS

(U) Some observers persistently lumped migrants into the refugee totals. For example:

Presently there is high employment in the urban areas and most *refugees* [emphasis added] have found means of support either directly because of the U.S. troops or indirectly by providing the troops with needed services, such as laundries and housekeeping.<sup>(103)</sup>

(U) Dr. Gerald C. Hickey, a leading authority on Vietnamese society, stated the situation more accurately:

. . . a good percentage of the people who flocked to the cities are not actually refugees. What happened is that the American military build-up and the way we fought the war basically restructured Vietnamese society from predominantly rural to predominantly urban.

At one time we had 60,000 American troops in Saigon alone, living in about 500 different buildings. This created a huge demand for maids, cooks, drivers, all kinds of services. So people came in to get jobs, to earn more cash than they ever had in their lives. They have found an entirely new way of life. They like it and they hope to stay put.

Out in the country, life is very quiet and isolated. In the cities, you stay up late, it is lots of fun with all kinds of people around. Vietnamese are very gregarious; they like the feeling of living all together in a crowd, with lots going on.

If you have just a little money in the city, you have electricity. Even a 20-watt bulb is better than an oil lamp. There are services people do not find in the countryside.<sup>(104)</sup>

Results from the PAAS (Pacification Attitude Analysis System) support Dr. Hickey's major points.

(U) *Urbanization.* When asked if they were native to the area, 75 percent of the urban respondents said no. Only 25 percent were native to the city they were living in.<sup>(105)</sup> The rest had come from somewhere else.

(U) *Jobs.* Many Vietnamese said they would move to another place to get a better job, according to the PAAS results shown in Table 138. The data suggest that the urban resident was more willing to move to another province than the rural resident. This is probably because he assumed he would be moving to another city. He had already moved to the one he is in now, so the idea of moving was not new. On the other hand, 22 percent



of the rural respondents were willing to move to another district in the same province to obtain a better job, so there may not have been much difference between the two groups on this issue.<sup>(106)</sup>

(U) Not only did significant portions of both groups say they would move to get a better job, but a significant percentage of them actually did move. The data from small samples suggest that 55 percent of the rural respondents and 33 percent of the urban respondents moved in their last job change; see Table 139.

(U) The differences suggest that it was easier for the urban respondent to find another job where he lived, than it was for the rural respondent. But when the urban respondent did move, he tended to move to another province. This suggests that he probably moved to an urban area in another province, since most provinces had only one major urban center. It may be a coincidence, but 22 percent of the Table 138 rural sample\* said they would move to another district or farther to get a better job, and 22 percent of the Table 139 rural sample actually moved that far or farther to get one.

(U) *"They Hope to Stay Put."* When asked: "What do you like best about living in an urban area?"<sup>(107)</sup> 48 percent of the respondents cited better security than in the countryside, which might suggest that security was the prime motive for living in the city. The rest of the sample cited better economic opportunities (19 percent), better educational and health facilities (10 percent), and better entertainment and atmosphere (4 percent) as the best aspects of urban life.

(U) Only 12 percent of the respondents said they didn't like living in an urban area and would return to the countryside when security permitted. Another set of PAAS questions suggests that only 15 percent of the urban respondents would return to their native rural area "if the war were to end today and peace were permanent."<sup>(108)</sup> Finally, 92 percent of the urban respondents native to their area said that they planned to remain where they were if the war ended.<sup>(109)</sup> More significant, 62 percent of the nonnative residents said they also planned to stay put.<sup>(110)</sup> Most urban dwellers clearly planned to stay in the city, even when

\*Detail not shown in the table.

TABLE 139. *Did your last job change require you to move your place of residence?* (Table unclassified.)

	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
No	45%	67%
Yes - To Another:		
Hamlet	13	2
Village	20	4
District	15	3
Province	5	21
Military Region	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
Subtotal Yes:	55%	33%
No. of Respondents	146	131

Source: PAAS Rural Question 177, asked in December 1971; Urban Question 5400, asked in December 1971 and September 1972.

security ceased to become a significant factor. Other research supports the notion that a great many migrants moved to the cities and towns for reasons other than security:

Among the most striking findings of the research reported here were that the war was only one of a number of reasons why people migrated to Saigon, that once in the city it did not figure prominently in the lives of those interviewed, and that it had relatively little significance to migrants in deciding if Saigon was to be their permanent home. In sharp contrast to the portrait of the population advanced by many as one caught between the two fires of the war—the GVN and the PRG—the authors found little evidence that this was the case. Instead, the migrants studied appeared suspended between war and peace, responding to pressures and events associated with neither.<sup>(111)</sup>

(U) The data also suggest that there was a good deal of mobility and aggressive job hunting in South Vietnam. It is simply not correct to say that the urban growth there was solely a product of refugee movements. Many of the rural families that moved to the cities went there to improve their lives, and they planned to stay. Urbanization has been a worldwide phenomenon for some time, so this should not be surprising.

REFUGEES

(U) Refugees were defined as people who were forced to move away from their homes and employ-



ment and who registered for government benefits. If they didn't register, they didn't show up in the statistics.

(U) Although other large-scale displacements of people have occurred in Vietnam's history, two of them can be directly related to events in Vietnam since World War II. The first occurred as a result of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, which gave all Vietnamese people 300 days to choose whether they wanted to live in North or South Vietnam. Approximately 900,000 people moved south and about 75,000 went north.<sup>(112)</sup> The Diem government and the French were swamped, and the United States became a third partner in the resettlement effort, providing \$56.8 million in aid.<sup>(113)</sup> Resettlement of the refugees was difficult, because there was little time for comprehensive planning and little resettlement land available. Yet the South Vietnamese Government and U.S. officials could point with pride to their accomplishments over the next three years, as some 660,000 of the refugees became nearly self-sufficient.<sup>(113)</sup> Work with the refugees continued through the late 1950's and into the 1960's, with important assistance coming from a number of U.S. voluntary agencies, but for all practical purposes the refugee problem was solved. A new but smaller crisis arose in 1962 and 1963 when Viet Cong harassment and terror drove approximately 150,000 Montagnards from their mountain homes.<sup>(114)</sup> But with the experience of the 1950's, this problem was quickly solved.

(U) The second large-scale displacement of people began to occur as the war intensified in 1965, and the problem began to build to 1954 levels and beyond. The second wave had at least one important difference from the first one: This time, most refugees moved only a few miles. The movement had little in common with the mass movements of refugees in Europe during World War II, when people were driven from their homelands and stayed homeless for years. Since the Vietnamese refugees remained nearby, for the most part, many of them were able to return home as security began to spread into the countryside in 1969.

(U) Throughout the country, but particularly in the camps in the northern part of South Vietnam, the continuous stream of refugees between 1965 and 1967 created widespread confusion and uncer-

tainty about how to deal with the problem. The challenge of caring for so many people while fighting a war was great. Lacking an adequate program or the resources for one, the GVN response was slow and hesitant.<sup>(115)</sup> United States concern about the problem began to mount, and American efforts to assist the refugees began to increase. In 1966 and 1967, the GVN and U.S. efforts were concentrated on developing an organization, recruiting people, finding resources, identifying the kinds of aid required in different refugee situations, and building up the necessary logistic support.<sup>(116)</sup> By the end of 1967 the stage was set for an all-out attack on the refugee problem. Then the VC/NVA launched its large offensives in 1968, starting at Tet, and temporarily displaced more than a million additional people; GVN and U.S. efforts concentrated on caring for them, and another year passed before efforts got under way in earnest to return the long-term refugees to their homes or resettle them.

(U) The problems of trying to get organized while the flow of refugees continued led the refugee program to be concentrated on payments to individuals who qualified.<sup>(99)</sup> This ensured that refugees received some assistance, but it also led to complex bureaucratic procedures of registration, authentication, and financial accounting, which generated delays when the refugee flows were highest. The focus on these procedures also cut into the ability of the GVN to give much assistance to refugee communities and camps.<sup>(99)</sup>

(U) In 1969, considerable progress was made in paying refugees their allowances (some long overdue), returning 200,000 of them to their homes,<sup>(117)</sup> and resettling others. The program continued to gain momentum, and then in 1972 the intense fighting leading up to the cease-fire agreement dislocated an estimated 1.2 million people, and the effort focused once again on short-term relief.

#### THE REFUGEE STATISTICS

(U) Table 140 shows summary statistics of the number of refugees who registered and to whom benefits were paid through the end of 1971. The reliability of the data is limited,\* but the table does give some idea of the enormity of the prob-

\*Despite considerable reporting efforts by CORDS and the GVN, the data in the table and those that follow remain crude estimates, and they don't track very well.



lem. And the 1972 offensive generated another 1.2 million refugees. The number of benefits exceeded the number of refugees, because many refugees received more than one set of benefits. For example, refugees might receive temporary benefits at the time they were registered and then be paid resettlement or return-to-village benefits when they went off the rolls.

THE REFUGEE PROGRAM

(U) The GVN refugee program did not provide extensive assistance to any individual or family, because the number of refugees was so large and the resources made available to help them so small.<sup>(118)</sup> The program worked somewhat as follows. Soon after refugee families reached secure areas, those seeking assistance were housed in temporary camps. Each newly arrived family received emergency food commodities for seven days, followed by a 2-month<sup>(119)</sup> temporary allowance, which was normally extended until the family could return home or begin to settle elsewhere, at which time additional benefits were paid.<sup>(118)</sup>

(U) *Temporary benefits* were designed to give interim assistance to people thrown into refugee status. Through the first quarter of 1971, 2.3 million refugees reportedly had received temporary benefits.<sup>(120)</sup>

(U) The benefits were provided by the GVN Ministry of Refugees and Social Welfare after the individual or family registered. The registration was handled by local officials, by the Ministry staff, or by special teams sent to register refugees. For the first seven days, the refugees would receive 500 grams of rice per person per day, three cans of condensed milk per family of at least five members, and 20 grams of salt per person per day, plus whatever shelter was available.<sup>(119)</sup> After the first week, refugees received either VN \$20 or 500 grams of rice per person per day, and temporary shelter was provided for the in-camp refugees. These benefits lasted two months, or until the refugees resettled or returned to their villages.<sup>(119)</sup> Added to these benefits was additional assistance in the form of PL-480 foods, aid from voluntary agencies, civic action assistance from military units that were located in the neighborhood, and assistance from international agencies and from other nations.

TABLE 140. *Refugees and benefits; thousands of persons. (Table unclassified.)*

	Newly Registered <sup>a/</sup>	Benefits Paid To <sup>b/</sup>
Prior to 1967	1678	1082
1967	463	572
1968	494	576
1969	114 (+476 registered for out-of-camp benefits) <sup>c/</sup>	1277
1970	129 (+281 registered for return-to-village benefits) <sup>c/</sup>	925
1971	136 4012 (sic) <sup>d/</sup>	450 plus 4882 plus

- a/ Source: Nooter, p. 38.  
b/ Source: Colby, p. 24.  
c/ Refugees generated in prior years but registered this year for out-of-camp or return-to-village benefits.  
d/ Figures add to 3771, but 4012 total is shown in source document, so there may be a typographical or other error in the yearly figures shown.

(U) Temporary benefits were paid to refugees not housed in temporary camps, if they lived in groups of 20 or more families,<sup>(120)</sup> and they were reported as out-of-camp refugees. Out-of-camp refugees gained attention in November 1968, when the GVN initiated a program to find and register all refugees throughout South Vietnam. The initial results of the survey added approximately 500,000 refugees to the rolls.

(U) *Resettlement benefits* were designed to assist refugees in settling somewhere other than their original homes. Before 1970, refugees receiving these benefits were reported as being resettled, although their problems were usually far from over. From 1970 on, they were reported as "resettlement benefits paid" in an attempt to reflect their status more accurately.<sup>(121,122)</sup>

(U) Basic resettlement benefits consisted of a VN\$3,600 food allowance per person for six months and VN\$7,500 and 10 sheets of roofing per family. Montagnards received, in addition, 20 grams of salt per person per day for six months. Additional aid was available from the PL-480 and other programs. Through the first quarter of 1971, approximately 1.7 million refugees reportedly had received resettlement benefits.<sup>(121,122)</sup> The figure is a crude estimate, although reported by GVN officials through the official reporting system, and there are allegations that some refugees reportedly receiving benefits did not receive them.



In Pleiku, Senate Subcommittee investigators in 1967 asserted that one group of 13,000 refugees was counted as resettled, but 10,000 of them had never received any part of a resettlement allowance.<sup>(100)</sup> In Binh Thuan, U.S. officials reportedly told subcommittee members that 115,000 refugees reportedly received resettlement allowances, but 65,000 of them got only part of their allowances or nothing at all.<sup>(100)</sup> As to those who were paid, GAO investigators—who were hardly to be considered experts in this field—found that “many of the refugees paid allowances by the GVN were, in our opinion, only slightly better off than prior to receipt of payments.”<sup>(123)</sup>

(U) *The return-to-village program* began in 1968 as a reflection of the improving security situation and to help people move back to their original villages. It became a major aspect of the pacification program to repopulate the countryside.<sup>(124)</sup> As a result of this emphasis, benefits—the same as for resettlement—were paid to people who had already received resettlement benefits, but wanted to return to their villages. Eligibility for benefits was also extended to those who had moved to Saigon, whether originally registered as refugees or not. On the other hand, more than 800,000 refugees are estimated to have returned to their villages before the program began, without receiving the benefits.<sup>(125)</sup>

(U) More than 600,000 refugees were reportedly paid return-to-village benefits during the period from 1969 through March 1971, and 280,000 were in the process of receiving the assistance at the end of that period.<sup>(125)</sup> The USAID/Vietnam Mission Director in April 1970 estimated that refugees returning to their villages under the program probably were about half as well off as before they were displaced.<sup>(126)</sup> Not too bad, given the numbers involved and continuation of the war that had displaced them.

(U) In 1970, two events generated more than 500,000 refugees independently of the war in South Vietnam. After Sihanouk's fall in Cambodia, the new government's anti-Communist stance there spilled over to affect all Vietnamese living in Cambodia, Communist or not. As a result, some 210,000 Vietnamese residents of Cambodia moved to South Vietnam with GVN assistance.<sup>(127)</sup> Most of the refugees went into hastily erected

camps, where they received temporary benefits, were released at their request, or were given help in finding a resettlement area. The second event was an extensive flood in six provinces of central Vietnam, which struck with little warning and within days made 325,000 people homeless.<sup>(128)</sup> They, too, received aid from the GVN, supported by U.S. helicopters and other resources.

#### TWO ISSUES: REFUGEE CAMPS AND RELOCATIONS

(U) The two refugee issues that drew the most criticism were conditions in the refugee camps and the *occasional* practice of forcing people to leave their homes and relocate elsewhere. These problems were most evident in the northern areas of South Vietnam where the fighting was most intense (see Chapter II) and where it was tougher to make a living than in the delta.

(U) The first issue was the refugee camps. Individual benefits have already been discussed, but there were additional needs beyond food and shelter for the refugees. Special programs were developed to address the needs of refugee camps (sites), resettlement centers, and return-to-village communities. The Ministry of Social Welfare Refugee Site Development Program, started in late 1966,<sup>(129)</sup> was designed to help refugees establish themselves in resettlement sites by providing facilities and services, such as wells, latrines, classrooms, simple health facilities and services, vocational training, and, where land was available,\* vegetable seeds and other agricultural assistance.

(U) Until 1970, the site-development program was impeded by the diversion of resources and emphasis to the higher priority needs of emergency relief and paying individual benefits. In 1970, reduced case loads, pacification momentum, and the emerging effects of the return-to-village program began to eliminate the need for some refugee camps and freed resources to improve others. The Ministry of Social Welfare budget in 1971 included VN \$538 million specifically earmarked for development of resettlement sites and reconstruction of community facilities in the refugees' original villages.<sup>(130)</sup>

\*Land was in short supply in Military Regions 1 and 2; see Chapter XIX.



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(U) Special efforts were made in Military Region 1, which had the worst camps.<sup>(131)</sup> In the delta (Military Region 4) many people also fled from their homes but, given the relative ease of subsisting there, they were quickly assimilated and never became the obvious problem represented by the people in northern refugee camps.<sup>(132)</sup>

(U) The shortcomings of the refugee camps were well known to the people trying to correct them. There was no attempt to hide the problem. For example, a monthly refugee report (March 20, 1970) for 402 occupied sites in South Vietnam said that 176 sites (42 percent of them) were overcrowded and 87 sites (21 percent) were deficient in medical support. In addition, 833 classrooms were needed and an undetermined number of sites had poor water supplies. Of the 382 sites assigned ratings by the Ministry of Social Welfare, 91 (24 percent) were rated substandard.<sup>(133)</sup>

(U) To sum up the problem, the USAID/Vietnam Mission Director estimated that most people in resettlement sites were only about one-third as well off as before being displaced.<sup>(134)</sup> Incidentally, it is important to remember that the war was fundamentally to blame, not the refugee program.

(U) The second issue involved relocations, forced and voluntary. During the height of the fighting in 1967 and 1968, and again in 1970 and 1971 (during the relocation of Montagnards in the Central Highlands and the ARVN operations in the U Minh Forest in the delta) civilians were forcibly removed from their homes at the insistence of the GVN military. However, when compared to the refugee totals, the numbers were relatively small. In fact, there are relatively few documented cases of forced relocation.

(U) The purpose of forced relocations was to move the people out of the way of military actions or to prevent their being used by the VC/NVA as sources of manpower, supplies, or intelligence. Criticism of forced relocations mounted because of the hardships they imposed on the people who were moved, so the GVN early in 1970 adopted a formal policy that called for bringing "security to the people instead of bringing people to security."\* The policy and guidelines for the exceptions where

\*This was always CORDS policy, and it protested several military relocation schemes.

relocation was really considered necessary were incorporated in decrees issued by the South Vietnamese Prime Minister on March 2 and April 18, 1970.<sup>(134)</sup> During the relocation of Montagnards from the Central Highlands in late 1970 and early 1971, GVN military and civilian authorities failed to comply with the directives.<sup>(135)</sup> The CORDS advisors at all levels made a concentrated effort to stop further forced relocations. These efforts resulted in another decree from the Prime Minister on May 12, 1971, reaffirming the GVN policy, restricting relocation of people, and tightening procedures by requiring on-the-spot inspection by regional and national pacification officials before approval of any relocation plan.<sup>(135)</sup> This reduced the problem to tolerable levels from then on.

(U) In contrast to forced relocation, designed to clear civilians out of an area until security could be established, *voluntary relocation* was designed to provide a new life for refugees who had little chance of returning to their original homes. As might be expected, voluntary relocation got mixed up with forced relocation in the eyes of the U.S. press, which raised an outcry when the program surfaced.

(U) A number of refugees from communities in Military Regions 1 and 2 had little or no hope of returning to their original homes or of supporting themselves where the refugee settlements were organized. Their plight generated the idea of voluntary relocation, and the GVN established a Directorate of Land Development and Hamlet Building, which drew up a plan to resettle people in need of land on land in need of people. The plan had two goals:<sup>(136)</sup>

- To offer refugee communities with no future an opportunity to move of their own free will to areas where they could make a living.
- To open up for productive use several hundred thousand hectares of idle government land and thereby aid the economic development of South Vietnam.

The goals were laudable, and they could benefit the people and the country. The danger, of course, was that the second aim could erode the voluntary nature of the first, if heavy emphasis was placed on opening up and taking control of vacant land.



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TABLE 141. *Refugee and social welfare funding summary; millions of U.S. dollars. (Table unclassified.)*

	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>	<u>FY 70</u>	<u>FY 71</u>	<u>FY 72</u>	<u>Totals</u>	<u>Percent</u>
AID Budget	17.9	9.5	5.9	3.8	1.7	38.8	9
Counterpart Funds <sup>a/</sup>	20.0	28.4	32.1	31.5	42.4	154.4	34
PL-480 Food (as programmed)	32.3	33.9	24.2	10.0	5.0	105.4	23
Ministry of Social Welfare (GVN Budget) <sup>a/</sup>	4.3	3.6	7.6	8.7	10.2	34.4	8
U.S. Voluntary Agencies	22.4	25.9	22.4	19.4	16.8	106.9	23
Free World Assistance	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	15.5	3
Military Civic Action (estimated)	.2	.2	.2	.2	N/A	.8	
TOTAL	100.2	104.6	95.5	76.7	79.2	456.2	

Sources: Colby, Annex D, for FY 68 through FY 70. Nooter, p. 39 for FY 71-72.

<sup>a</sup> Piasters converted to dollars at 118 piasters to 1 dollar.

(U) It is clear that South Vietnamese people were willing to move to other areas to improve their standards of living. The PAAS data have shown this to be true. Also, there is the precedent of 900,000 people voting with their feet and moving south in 1954 to settle on vacant land. The 200,000 refugees from Cambodia also moved into some of the vacant land owned by the GVN.

(U) Preparations for the first pilot project under the new program began in the summer of 1971. Ha Thanh hamlet in Quang Tri province was the first hamlet to be offered resettlement. Ha Thanh, two miles below the DMZ, was established as a temporary refugee camp in 1967 for 15,000 refugees, but it never became self-supporting. About two-thirds of its population drifted away, leaving about 5,000 people living in abject poverty.<sup>(137)</sup> After a process that included consultation with provincial and district officials, a presentation to the villagers, a request from them for more particulars, and a trip by hamlet representatives to Military Region 3, where they inspected various sites, the population of Ha Thanh and their personal belongings were taken by air or ship to various sites in Military Region 3. With the help of resettlement allowances and other GVN assistance, they began to work the land allotted to them, build houses, and settle down. By May of 1972, the GVN had requests from another 12,000 refugees to relocate from Military Region 1 to Military Regions 3 and 4 during the remainder of 1972.<sup>(138)</sup>

## WAR VICTIMS

(U) War victims constituted a separate category developed in 1968 to provide benefits to civilians who, as a result of the war, suffered personal injury or damage to property, but who did not have to leave their homes for a long time. The war victim benefits for property damage, death, and injuries were as follows.<sup>(139)</sup> All families whose houses were damaged 20 percent or more were eligible to receive the following commodities: 2 meters of cloth per person, one blanket and one mosquito net per family of two to four persons, and two mosquito nets for each family with five or more members. If money was paid in lieu of commodities, the rates were 50 piasters per meter of cloth, 400 piasters per blanket, and 400 piasters per mosquito net. Families with houses damaged 20 to 50 percent received in addition 500 grams of rice per person per day for 15 days, or money at the rate of 40 piasters per kilogram of rice. A house-construction allowance of 3,000 piasters was also provided. Families with houses damaged more than 50 percent received the same rice allowance, but for 30 days (not 15), and they also received a house-construction allowance of 7,500 piasters plus 10 sheets of roofing. Death benefits were 4,000 piasters if the deceased was 15 years old or older and 2,000 piasters if the deceased was younger. Injuries requiring medical treatment for at least 7 days received a benefit in the amount of 2,000 piasters.



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(U) By the first quarter of 1971, approximately 1.6 million war victims had registered for benefits, and 1.35 million (83 percent) had reportedly received them.<sup>(140)</sup> The totals include approximately 1 million temporary victims of the Tet and May 1968 offensives. Most of the Tet 1968 "refugees" were actually war victims, aided through Project Recovery and other civil programs.<sup>(116, 117, 140)</sup>

### RESOURCES

(U) Table 141 shows that funding support for the refugee and social welfare programs in South Vietnam amounted to about \$100 million per year until fiscal 1971 when it dropped to about \$75 million to \$80 million. The decline stemmed from reductions in the AID budget, PL-480 food, and U.S. voluntary assistance, but it was attenuated somewhat by rises in counterpart funds and the GVN budget.

(U) For the period as a whole, 80 percent of the funding support for refugee and social welfare programs came from three sources: counterpart funds (34 percent), PL-480 food (23 percent), and U.S. voluntary agencies (23 percent). The rest came from the GVN. It must also be acknowledged that the much larger amounts of U.S. aid and GVN funds spent on local economic revival, anti-inflation programs, and repair and maintenance of transport and communications also benefited refugees, along with the general population. Moreover, most refugees did earn some income on their own.

*(U) On the other hand, it is difficult to understand why the United States didn't spend more on assistance for refugees and war victims, given the billions of U.S. dollars spent on the war effort. It is also surprising that Congressional critics of the refugee conditions did not push harder to appropriate or earmark more funds for this purpose.*



## Chapter XIX

### How Extensive Was Land Reform?

Sixteen years of broken promises on land reform provide warrant for skepticism about the new legislation President Thieu has signed, yet *there is now more reason than before to believe that tenant farming at last will be virtually ended in South Vietnam.*

. . . the far-reaching nature of the legislation—*probably the most ambitious and progressive land reform of the Twentieth Century*—provides built-in safeguards against evasion.<sup>(141)</sup>

*New York Times Editorial, April 1970*

In fact, the land distribution programme implemented by Saigon has effectively taken place; it does not exist only on paper.<sup>(142)</sup>

*Oliver Todd, September 1973\**

(U) A key Communist strategy in South Vietnam was to concentrate on the rural population, and perhaps their most powerful appeal was the promise of land. When the VC/NVA forces took over a village, they told the farmers that the landlords would be chased out or killed and that the tenant farmers would be given the land they were farming. But they didn't tell them that land would be given only to those who actively supported Communists. No title would be issued. If the tenant farmer died, the land would not be left with the widow and children, but would be given to another farmer who was friendly to the VC/NVA. Finally, after an interval of, say, five or ten years, the farmers would surrender their lands to a commune, of which they would then be part.<sup>(143)</sup>

(U) The promise of land had powerful appeal in South Vietnam, as seen below, and land reform was a constant GVN theme from the early 1950's. But little land was distributed to landless peasants until the Land-to-the-Tiller Program began in 1970.

#### SITUATION PRIOR TO 1970

(U) *South Vietnam had one of the world's highest tenancy rates before the Land-to-the-Tiller Program began in 1970.* The GVN estimated that approximately 60 percent of all the rice and secondary-crop land was being farmed by tenant farmers who did not own the land.<sup>(143)</sup> A U.S. consultant to the 1967-68 study of South Vietnam's land tenure situation stated that: "In its percentage of landlessness, the Mekong Delta . . . qualified as one of the five worst areas of the world."<sup>(144)</sup>

(U) A tenant farmer in southern South Vietnam cultivated 2 hectares (1 hectare=2.47 acres) on average, paying a rent that averaged about 35 percent of his crop. In the Central Highlands of South Vietnam the plot averaged about 1 hectare.<sup>(145)</sup> The farmer was a manager, and the landlord normally did not participate in the production process. He did not furnish seed, credit, farm implements, or marketing outlets—he simply collected the rent.

\*Mr. Todd, a British-born writer, has closely observed Vietnam for almost two decades, and he is a long-time associate of *Le Nouvel-Observateur*, a leading left-of-center French weekly.



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(U) Land tenancy had been high for a long time, particularly in the southern portion of South Vietnam. In 1945, about 6,000 landowners held 1.2 million hectares (nearly 3 million acres) of cultivated land there, while in the Mekong Delta, 430 French nationals owned 250,000 hectares of land. Eighty percent of the land in that area was farmed by tenants, who were paying rentals as high as 50 percent of the crop.<sup>(146)</sup>

(U) Early in 1951, Emperor Bao Dai proclaimed a land tenure reform program, but the committee to carry it out was not organized until late 1952. By then, political difficulties and the deteriorating military situation prevented execution of the program.<sup>(146)</sup>\*

(U) In 1956, under U.S. pressure, President Ngo Dinh Diem decreed a 100-hectare limit (247 acres) to riceland ownership (Ordinance 57). Any excess was to be expropriated and sold to the farmers. The owners received 10 percent of the land price in cash and the remaining 90 percent in government bonds redeemable over 12 years.<sup>(146)</sup> The redistribution of land to the farmers proceeded slowly. The 100 hectare ceiling freed only 453,000 hectares for redistribution, plus 230,000† hectares (of the French-owned land) bought in 1958. By the end of 1962, some 428,000 hectares had been expropriated,<sup>(147)</sup> but a year later only about half of that land (246,000 hectares) had been sold to the farmers, benefiting 115,000 families.<sup>(141)</sup> Only 45,000 additional hectares of land were distributed to 21,000 families during the five years between the end of 1963 and the end of 1968.<sup>(148)</sup> None of the former French land was distributed until 1966, and most of it was still in government hands at the end of 1968.<sup>(148)</sup>

(U) The new constitution for South Vietnam, promulgated in April 1967, emphasized in Article 19 that "The State advocates a policy of making the people property owners," and in Article 21, "The State advocates raising the standard of living of rural citizens and especially helping farmers to have land for cultivation." No effects were seen until 1969, when land reform began to

\*For an account of earliest land reform efforts in Vietnam, see "Land Reform of Vietnam Through History", by Phuong Anh Trang, in *Viet-Nam Bulletin* of March 22, 1971, pages 2-4.

†Ninety-two percent of the total of 250,000 hectares owned by the French.

gather momentum. Land distribution skyrocketed, by previous standards, and 310,000 hectares were distributed to 232,000 tenant families under the various programs in existence.<sup>(148)</sup> In April 1969, the government froze land occupancy and rents for one year to prepare for the new land reform. This prevented landlords from changing tenants before the new program could go into effect, and the rent freeze permitted tenants to retain the increased returns from using fertilizers and new seeds.<sup>(149)</sup> In June 1969, the "Land-to-the-Tiller" bill was approved by the Cabinet and sent to the National Assembly the following month.<sup>(149)</sup>

(U) The stage was set for a major land reform program, and the South Vietnamese tenant farmers were ready for it. Surveys of Vietnamese attitudes<sup>(150)</sup> in Military Regions 3 and 4 toward land ownership and reform indicated that strong antagonism between landlords and tenants was rare (some were relatives), even though the average rent being charged was 35 percent of the crop, above the 25 percent maximum fixed by law. Landlords were not meeting their obligation to reduce rents in case of total or partial crop failure, and more than half of the tenants eligible for reductions in 1966 did not get what they were entitled to. Eighty percent of the tenants said they would be willing to buy the property they rented and would pay its current market value, if the purchase was divided into 12 annual installments. *Offered a choice between permanent guaranteed occupancy and purchase, 85 percent preferred purchase. When asked what was needed to improve life in the village, 37 percent of the respondents mentioned land ownership.* (The need for credit was a close second with 36 percent.) Only 6 percent of the respondents had received land under President Diem's Ordinance 57, and 84 percent of them said the plots were too small.

(U) On the other hand, 91 percent of the landlord respondents who had held more than 100 hectares lost the surplus hectares. Eighty-three percent of the landlords interviewed said they had approved of Ordinance 57 in principle, because they were aware of the need for it. Landlord complaints about Ordinance 57 centered on the administration of it, including compensation, and the fact that the government held on to the expropriated lands and rented them out for years. Absentee landlords

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were asked about future land reform; 20 percent said they favored it, 32 percent would not oppose it, and 25 percent would abide by the government's decision. Some of those most favorably inclined held land in areas that were not secure, so the idea of government payment for land they couldn't use anyway probably had considerable appeal.

(U) Thus, the results suggest that the tenant farmers were eager to own their land—even at full current prices—and most of the landlords said they were not opposed to a land reform program.

### LAND-TO-THE-TILLER LAW

(U) On March 26, 1970 after passage by the legislative bodies, President Thieu, who had "fought a bitter battle to get the reform adopted without crippling amendments,"<sup>(141)</sup> signed the Land-to-the-Tiller bill into law. Its stated purpose was to abolish farm tenancy and create a nation of landowners. Title was to be given, free of charge, to all persons farming rice land as tenants, sharecroppers, squatters, or Viet Cong appointed cultivators. The bill was expected to affect approximately 800,000 farm families who were farming 1.3 million hectares of rice land,<sup>(151)</sup> and the 16,000 landlords who owned the land.<sup>(152)</sup>

(U) The main features of the program resulting from the bill were:<sup>(152)</sup>

- Land holdings were limited to 15 hectares (37 acres). All other land would be redistributed, *free*, to the farmers, a significant departure from past programs.
- Titles were to be issued by the village Administrative Committee and registered with the Province and Central Governments. (Only 10 percent of people on the village committees were landlords, and 30 percent of the village officials would benefit from the program.)
- Landlords were to be paid a price equal to 2.5 times the annual paddy yield of the land; 20 percent in cash immediately, the balance in negotiable bonds redeemable over eight years and bearing 10 percent interest.
- Farmers would receive a 3-hectare plot in the delta (1 hectare in central Vietnam) and would not be liable for back taxes or back rent, but would pay taxes in the future, after they had held the land for one year.
- Farmers had to till the land to keep it.

### THE PROGRAM

(U) In signing the new law, President Thieu announced that the GVN would distribute 1 million hectares (2.5 million acres) of land to tenant farmers within three years.<sup>(153)</sup> *They did it.* By April 1973 the GVN had printed the new titles for 2.5 million acres and had distributed about 75 percent of this land to farmers. It had issued 60,700 checks for VN\$14.8 billion and 506,600 bonds valued at VN\$82 billion.<sup>(154)</sup> Several key elements combined to enable the program to meet its goals. First, it had the advantage of top level leadership and ability. President Thieu gave clear, unwavering support to the program and put good leaders in charge of it.

(U) Second, and perhaps even more important, the program was decentralized to the village. A Land Distribution Committee was established in each village, with the authority to make the decisions about who received the land. It also made the decisions about compensation, particularly determinations of true owners and plot yields. The typical province administration (with 40 to 50 villages) simply could not have handled the volume and met the deadline.

(U) Third, aerial photography instead of land cadastral surveys was used to locate and identify the plots of land to be distributed, and the entire process of registering the land, issuing it, and paying for it was done with the assistance of computers. The semiautomatic system thus created was instrumental in overcoming bureaucratic delays in title preparation and distribution.

(U) Fourth, the GVN focused sharply on two main tasks, distributing land and paying for it. As soon as the land was identified and allocated by the village committee, it was issued, even though precise records were often not available. In this manner, and with the assistance of the aerial photography and computers, the GVN avoided a long tooling up period and got the program moving right away. This contrasted sharply with the previous land reform programs in South Vietnam.

(U) Finally, the program was given massive publicity. During 1970, the PAAS suggested that 70 to 80 percent of the rural population had some awareness of the Land-to-the-Tiller Law,<sup>(155)</sup> with approximately 45 percent of them having heard



TABLE 142. *Basic statistics of the Land-to-the-Tiller Program through March 31, 1973. (Table unclassified.)*

		Hectares
Applications Approved	910,915	1,067,512
Titles Issued	867,592	1,007,217
Titles Distributed	680,136	792,491

about it from the radio.<sup>(156)</sup> It was a popular topic with the people and, when asked what kind of people's information should be emphasized and which they liked best, Land-to-the-Tiller was a favorite topic.<sup>(157)</sup>

(U) Although the farmers were willing to pay for the land, the GVN, possibly to counter the Communist program of free land, decided to give the land away and have the government pay the landlord. The payments were estimated at the equivalent of \$537 million through 1981.<sup>(158)</sup> This placed a serious financial burden on the GVN, and U.S. assistance was expected to be necessary to help meet the expense.

THE RESULTS

(U) Table 142 displays the basic statistics of the Land-to-the-Tiller Program through March 31, 1973.<sup>(159)</sup> The table implies that the average plot of land involved with each application and title was 1.16 hectares, or 2.9 acres. In a PAAS survey of 938 rural respondents in January 1972, seventy-two percent said their family owned less than two hectares of land and 55 percent owned less than one hectare.<sup>(160)</sup> (The plot sizes above don't seem so small, after all.)

(U) When the 495,000 hectares<sup>(161)</sup> distributed by other land reform efforts are added to the Land-to-the-Tiller Program, the total land distribution is 1.5 million hectares. *The total amount of rice land in South Vietnam was 2.3 million hectares. Between 1956 and 1973, sixty-five percent of it was redistributed.* Nonetheless, the GVN continued to distribute the land remaining under the Land-to-the-Tiller Law, estimated at approximately 295,000 hectares.<sup>(162)</sup>

(U) In central Vietnam the program was not very effective, mainly because the land plots were small and there was little absentee ownership.<sup>(163, 164)</sup> The

TABLE 143. *What is your occupation? (Table unclassified.)*

	December 1970 %	December 1972 %
Farm Laborer	16	10
Tenant Farmer	28	7
Landowner	29	56
Total	73%	73%
Nr. Respondents (100%)	3307	4032

other main weakness was that the land reform program for Montagnards was poorly executed and did not receive adequate GVN support.<sup>(165, 166)</sup>

(U) The data are probably fairly reliable, because monitoring and inspection of the Land-to-the-Tiller Program was pretty good. The key decisions were made in the village, and this probably did much to ensure the fairness of the program. The local people knew the plots, who owned them, and who was tilling them.

(U) The program appeared to be quite "clean," given the large potential for corruption. There are reports of "tea money" being paid by landlords to get officials to expedite payments, but the grievance rate from farmers was low. Few, if any, scandals surfaced in the American press, and the U.S. General Accounting Office seemed satisfied with the program.

(U) The Vietnamese peasant, as usual, wasn't as impressed as the outsiders. Six rural PAAS surveys asked 5,900 rural respondents if they believed the Land-to-the-Tiller Law was being administered fairly in their village. Of the 3,500 who had an opinion, 47 percent said yes and 28 percent said no.<sup>(167)</sup>

(U) The VC/NVA never mounted much of an attack against the program. Isolated, critical statements were issued from time to time, but they did not amount to much.<sup>(168)</sup>

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM

(U) *The Land-to-the-Tiller Program in three years dropped land tenancy in South Vietnam from 60 percent of cropland down to 10 percent—and the GVN still continued to distribute land.*<sup>(169)</sup> Data from the PAAS support the contention that the



number of landowners increased dramatically. In December 1970 and in December 1972, seventy-three percent of the PAAS rural respondents said they were farmers. The shift from tenant to landowner is shown in Table 143.<sup>(170)</sup> Twenty-nine percent said they were landowners in 1970, and 56 percent said so two years later.

(U) As the results vanish into the Communist version of land reform, we shall probably never know whether the peasants receiving land provided real support to the GVN. But the short-term results appeared favorable. A study in 1972 concluded that the program had hurt the VC/NVA politically, reduced peasant neutrality, helped unify the village as a local government and community, created an appetite for land among the landless, and received credit for more changes than it probably should have.<sup>(171)</sup> A General Accounting

Office team reported: "Most farmers we talked to were pleased to be landowners and believed they were better off now economically."<sup>(158)</sup>

(U) Before land reform, Japan's tenancy rate was 65 percent, Taiwan's was 50 percent, and South Vietnam's was 60 percent. Approximately 3.8 million *acres* were distributed in South Vietnam, compared to Japan's 4.2 million acres and Taiwan's 600,000 acres,<sup>(140)</sup> and land tenancy in Vietnam dropped to 10 percent. The *New York Times* was right—it probably was "the most ambitious and progressive land reform of the Twentieth Century." *The land reform program carried out in South Vietnam, in the midst of a war, was a remarkable accomplishment. The irony is that no one seemed to notice it (the VC/NVA and the American public ignored it), except the farmers who got to own their land.*



## Chapter XX

### How Well Was Inflation Contained?

(U) Inflation is a by-product of war, and in this the Vietnam War was no exception. In that case, increased government spending for national defense, coupled with Allied spending (mostly by Americans), generated excessive demand for a limited supply of local goods, a supply that was sometimes reduced by the war.

(U) The analysis here does not attempt to deal with the economics of South Vietnam during the war. That subject is much too complex to address here, and moreover it deserves treatment by a qualified economist. The inquiry is limited to (1) a simple presentation of the inflation problem in South Vietnam 1965-72, (2) a comparison with wartime inflation in South Korea 1950-53, and (3) some views of the South Vietnamese people about inflation and their economic situation.

#### IMPACT OF THE WAR ON PRICES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(U) Inflation is expressed here by consumer price indexes. Table 144 displays consumer price indexes for South Vietnam, three other Southeast Asian countries, South Korea, and Brazil from 1963 through 1972. The table suggests that consumer prices in South Vietnam rose more than four times as fast as they did in the other Southeast Asian countries, but not as fast as in Brazil. According to the International Monetary Fund, South Vietnam's inflation problem was worse than 65 other countries listed.<sup>(173)</sup> Only Uruguay, Brazil, and Chile had faster price rises.

(U) The data suggest that the answer to the

question "How well was inflation contained?" is "Not very well!" Inflation in South Vietnam was bad. However, to add perspective to the comparison, it is necessary to find a country that suffered a war and relied heavily on outside forces to fight it. South Korea during the Korean War (1950-53) fits into that category.

#### COMPARING WARTIME INFLATION IN KOREA AND VIETNAM

(U) There are many differences between the situations in South Vietnam and Korea, including the kind of war being fought, the stability of the regimes, and many other factors, so care must be taken not to overstate the comparison or to draw far-reaching conclusions from it. Nonetheless, it is interesting and useful to compare the effects of the respective wars on price increases in the two economies.

(U) In Korea and Vietnam, war brought inflation, with the inflation in Korea being much more severe than the inflation in South Vietnam, as shown in Table 145. In the first year of the Korean War, retail prices in Seoul rose nearly 300 percent, and before the war was over prices were more than 20 times higher (1,980 percent) than they were before it started. By 1956 they were 57 times higher (5,623 percent), although they fell the following year. In South Vietnam prices rose less than 100 percent during the first year that U.S. troops were committed to the war. By the time of the cease-fire agreement in January 1973, prices had risen to a level about 10 times higher than



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TABLE 144. *South Vietnam's prices rose at least four times as fast as prices in other Southeast Asian countries. (Table unclassified.)*

End of Year:	South Viet-Nam	Thailand	Malaysia	Philippines	Korea	Brazil
1963	100	100	100	100	100	100
1966	194	107	101	117	163	445
1967	279	111	105	124	180	591
1968	358	113	105	127	201	723
1969	431	116	104	130	221	886
1970	590	117	106	148	249	1082
1971	698	119	108	170	280	1300
1972	875	124	112	188	313	1514

Source: International Monetary Fund, "Changes in Consumer Prices,"

International Financial Statistics, Vol. XXVI, Number 9, September

1973, p. 35.

before U.S. forces went into combat, or 881 percent. This amounts to an average price increase of 33 percent per year.

(U) Inflation was a greater problem in Korea, even before the war began there. From 1946 through 1950, Korean prices increased more than sixfold

TABLE 145. *Korean War inflation was much worse than Vietnam War inflation. (Table unclassified.)*

End of Year	South Viet-Nam	South Korea	
	Retail Price Index-Saigon a/	Retail Price Index-Seoul b/	End of Year
1964	100	100	Mid-1950
1965	N/A	189	End-1950
1966	216	607	1951
1967	305	1268	1952
1968	408	2080	1953
1969	539	3077	1954
1970	698	3920	1955
1971	798	5723	1956
1972	981	5209	1957

a/ Source: Viet-Nam Economic Data - December 1972, Office of Economic Policy, Viet-Nam Programs, Agency for International Development, p. 1.

b/ Source: Table 43: Development of the Korean Economy, 1958, Ministry of Reconstruction, Republic of Korea. The index series was constructed on the basis of yearly percentage changes in the Bank of Korea Seoul Retail Price Index, June 30, 1950 = 100.

NOTE: These indexes are based on a January 1, 1965 base for South Viet-Nam, and a June 30, 1950 base for South Korea, so the numbers are different from those in Table 144, which is based on a 1963 base.

(500 percent). In the four years before 1965, South Vietnamese prices increased by about half (50 percent).<sup>(174)</sup> In both countries, the pace of inflation increased with the arrival of Allied forces. (U) According to the crude quantity theory of money, an increase in the money supply, all other things being equal, brings about a proportionate increase in prices. Loss of confidence in the currency, however, can generate exaggerated price rises in reaction to large and continued increases in the money supply. This happened in Korea, but not in South Vietnam. Table 146 shows that the Korean money supply was 290 times higher at the end of the period shown, while the Vietnamese money supply was only 11 times higher.

(U) In Korea, the relationship between money-supply increases and price increases passed through three phases. In the first phase (the prewar years), prices rose at a slower rate than the increase in money supply—from the end of 1947 to the end of 1949, the money supply tripled and prices doubled. In the second phase (the first two years of the war, 1950 and 1951), prices rose much faster than the money supply—money supply up sixfold, prices up nearly twice as much. In the third phase (from the end of 1951 to the end of 1953), prices again rose at a slower rate—while the money supply quadrupled, price increases tripled.

(U) In Vietnam, until 1966, price rises were slower than money-supply increases. From 1961 through the end of 1965, price rises were less than money-



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TABLE 146. *The money supplies rose. (Table unclassified.)*

<u>End of Year</u>	South Viet-Nam	South Korea	<u>End of Year</u>
	Money Supply <u>a/</u> (Billions of Piasters)	Money Supply <u>b/</u> (Billions of Hwan)	
1962	19.5	0.5	1947
1963	22.3	0.7	1948
1964	27.4	1.2	1949
1965	47.6	2.8	1950
1966	65.4	7.3	1951
1967	82.2	14.3	1952
1968	124.1	30.3	1953
1969	140.7	58.1	1954
1970	162.9	93.5	1955
1971	208.4	120.9	1956
1972	220.6	145.2	1957

a/ Source: For 1962-65: Table C-3; Annual Statistical Bulletin, Number 11 and Supplement, Office of Joint Economic Affairs, USAID/VN.

For 1966-72: Viet-Nam Economic Data - December 1972, Office of Economic Policy, Viet-Nam Programs, Agency for International Development, p. 5.

b/ Source: Tables A-35 and A-43; Development of the Korean Economy, 1958, Ministry of Reconstruction, Republic of Korea.

supply increases in every year.<sup>(175)</sup> The prime reason for this was that the economy was not yet fully employed. In addition, the increasing monetization of the rural areas was absorbing some of the increase in the money supply.

(U) In 1966, however, with the advent of full employment, prices rose faster—while the money supply increased by slightly less than 50 percent, prices increased by slightly more than that. American stabilization policies had acted after 1966 to limit inflation to an average of 30 percent per year until the end of 1972. The addition of effective Vietnamese economic reforms and U.S. troop withdrawals helped hold price rises to 14 percent in 1971 and to 23 percent in 1972, despite extremely heavy fighting and disruption most of that year.

#### WHY WAS INFLATION LESS OF A PROBLEM IN VIETNAM?

(U) War almost invariably brings sharp increases in the money supply. Government expenditures increase while revenues, because of war disruption,

decline. The government generally resorts to printing money to finance the deficit. Controlling inflation must involve measures which either (1) increase revenues, (2) reduce costs (of the local government and of the Allied forces), (3) reduce extensions of credit, or (4) increase imports (that is, offsetting increasing demand through increasing imports). These factors were controlled better in Vietnam than in Korea, with the result that inflation was not as bad there.

(U) In the first place, there was a much larger and more consistent import program in Vietnam. Imports more than absorbed the money created by Allied spending in every year from 1963 through 1967. In Korea, imports never offset Allied spending, and in the first phase of the war\* imports were pitifully low.

(U) Second, Allied spending was much more carefully controlled in Vietnam. In Korea, there were various recommendations to reduce local hire and to increase offshore purchases, but no control

\*Second quarter 1950 to first quarter 1951.



TABLE 147. *How do you rate GVN performance in handling economic problems? (Table unclassified.)*

	Urban	Rural
Poor	63%	36%
Successful	23%	42%
Doesn't Know	11%	22%
No. of Respondents	5096	8300

PAAS Urban Question 5109, asked in March, April, May, June, July, and October 1971, and in May, June, July, August, 1972. PAAS Rural Question 101, asked in the same months, except May 1972.

mechanism such as the "piaster ceiling" was introduced. Although the ceiling in Vietnam was useful in 1966-67, when the Saigon port was clogged, it eventually contributed to the problem by withholding U.S. dollars from the GVN.

(U) Third, credit expansion in Korea was much greater and much more erratic. Until 1966, credit expansion in Vietnam was negligible, and the increases after that were primarily associated with the rising flow of imports.

(U) Finally, in both Korea and Vietnam, controlling the government budget and increasing the revenues were difficult to achieve. The Korean government was able to balance its budget after March 1951 only by shifting the financial care of refugees and POW's from its own account to the UN count. The GVN budget did not balance either.

(U) *It is clear that, by Korean War standards, the U.S. helped the South Vietnamese to contain their inflation fairly well.* But the South Vietnamese people didn't think so.

#### WHAT DID THE PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE ECONOMIC SITUATION?

(U) The Pacification Attitude Analysis System (PAAS) offers some insights into what the South Vietnamese people thought about their economic situation. Remember, they were caught in one of the worst inflations in the world, although not as bad as the Brazilians or as the Koreans during the Korean War.

(U) Urban respondents believed that the GVN performance in handling economic problems was poor. The results of urban and rural PAAS surveys are shown in Table 147. The rural respondents were happier with the GVN economic performance

than were the urban respondents, who had to bear the full brunt of inflation. Actually, considering the rate of inflation, the results can be viewed as mild.

(U) Urban and rural respondents agreed about which area of the economic sector had been hit hardest by rising prices, namely, everything (urban, 50 percent; rural, 56 percent). Most of the rest cited food (urban, 36 percent; rural, 31 percent).<sup>(176)</sup> But their views of who suffered the most from inflation varied in an expected way. Both sets of respondents agreed that soldiers, civil servants, and workers were suffering, but the rural respondents emphasized farmers, while the urban respondents emphasized workers. Neither believed that the merchants suffered most.<sup>(177)</sup>

(U) In 1971 and 1972, sixty-five percent of the urban and rural respondents agreed that "prices increased faster this year than they did last year" (64 percent urban; 66 percent rural). About 15 percent said that the increase was the same, and another 15 percent said it was slower.<sup>(178)</sup> These responses clearly bear little relationship to the actual movements of the price indexes shown earlier (the 1971 increase was much less than the 1970 increase), but they do convey a mood of dissatisfaction.

(U) When asked about the causes of the inflation, urban and rural respondents most often blamed natural conditions of war and exploitation by merchants. Urban respondents also cited "heavy spending by U.S. troops and the GVN budget," showing more sophistication than rural respondents, many of whom simply cited high prices as the "cause" of inflation.<sup>(179)</sup>

(U) Urban and rural respondents were also asked what could be done to control inflation. Price controls, more production, and reducing government expenditures were the measures mentioned most often. Rural residents tended to favor price controls (39 percent) while the urban respondents split about evenly for price controls (22 percent) and higher production in Vietnam for sale outside of Vietnam (20 percent).<sup>(180)</sup>

(U) In summary, *the Vietnamese people were acutely aware of the inflation* and urban and rural respondents were in fair agreement that:

- The GVN's economic performance left something to be desired,



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- Rising prices affected everything, particularly food,
- Salaried people suffered the most,
- Prices were always increasing faster than they did last year (even when they weren't),
- Inflation was caused by the natural conditions of war, exploitation by merchants, and heavy U.S. and GVN spending, and
- Price controls, higher production, and reduced GVN spending would help solve the inflation problem.

(U) In addition to asking about inflation, the PAAS covered other economic matters. One question had asked about general economic conditions now, compared to five years ago.<sup>(180)</sup> The rural respondents generally felt they were better off, despite inflation, but the urban respondents did not; the pattern of their responses was exactly the opposite. This fits the situation, because the farmers were able to cope with inflation better than the city dwellers. They could raise the prices of their crops or even hold them off the market while prices rose. The radio ended the dominance of the Chinese rice merchants, because it told everyone the wholesale and retail prices of rice in Saigon and other cities. The farmers could bargain with the local rice dealer accordingly, knowing that inflation would continue to increase the price of rice, if they had to hold their crops for awhile. Also, many farmers were benefiting from land reform, becoming landowners for the first time (see Chapter XIX).

(U) When rural respondents were asked what they liked best about living in a rural area, 40 percent cited the lower cost of living.<sup>(182)</sup> City dwellers had fewer ways to protect themselves. When asked what they disliked most about living in the city, 42 percent cited the high cost of living.<sup>(183)</sup> Those in both groups who felt that economic conditions had improved thought the merchants had benefited most. Fifty-six percent of the 347 urban respondents felt this way, compared to 36 percent of the

1,501 rural respondents. Twelve percent of the latter felt that poor farmers who owned their land had benefited most, perhaps an effect of land reform.<sup>(184)</sup>

(U) Despite their complaints, it seems clear that the standards of living of most Vietnamese rose during the war. Refugees and others hard hit by the war were obvious exceptions. More people went to work and earned more money to buy more goods than ever before, and the import program kept the markets supplied with consumer goods of all types, bringing on the Honda and transistor revolutions. In the countryside, farmers took advantage of miracle rice, fertilizers, tractors, the ability to hold rice off the market to raise prices, and a variety of other techniques to increase their incomes.

(U) Some clue to the standard of living can be gleaned from answers to the question: "If you had extra money, what would be the first thing that you would do with it?"<sup>(185)</sup> Basically, both urban and rural respondents would either have fixed up their houses or invested the money—hardly the response of people who were destitute. Vietnamese interest in fixing up their homes was cited by a hardware dealer in the town of Gia Nghia, who bemoaned the lack of business since the VC/NVA had begun an effort to cut off the town. "In peacetime, people want to fix up their houses. But who wants to repair anything at a time like this?"<sup>(186)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

(U) To return to the question: How well was inflation contained? The Korean experience, the substantial reduction in inflation during 1971 and 1972, and the rising standard of living of most South Vietnamese during the war all suggest that the effects of inflation were contained very well, given the circumstances. After the January 1973 cease-fire, however, inflation became a serious problem again as U.S. levels of assistance declined markedly.



## Epilogue—1975

(U) The United States committed its military forces to battle in 1965. Eight years later, at the end of 1972, after one final surge of bombing, they were gone and a "cease-fire" agreement was signed with the Communists in January 1973. All American ground, air, and naval forces were out of the conflict, and so were virtually all the military advisors.

(U) The South Vietnamese forces appeared to be doing a good job. They had repulsed the 1972 offensives without the help of U.S. ground forces, but with the aid of heavy American air and logistics support. On the other hand, they had not moved forcefully to solve their critical problem of poor leadership. Without improved leadership they could not improve their training, clean out their staffs, and fill their combat units to full strength. Moreover, the departure of U.S. and South Korean forces left the anti-Communist side weaker than before the "cease-fire."

(U) Pacification had been successful. There was widespread evidence and agreement that the Government of Vietnam exercised a predominant influence over the vast majority of South Vietnamese people, although the HES and other figures reflected setbacks during the heavy fighting of 1972.

(U) But the Communist troops and infrastructure were still intact and in place, despite the tremendous allocation of Allied resources, effort, and lives to the strategy of attrition. At the end of 1972 the VC/NVA forces were battered, to be sure, but they

were still in the fight and they had improved their ability to wage large-scale conventional warfare. Moreover, the "cease-fire" agreement was signed in January, which traditionally ushered in their peak combat effort of the year. Although it was not recognized at the time, the military balance was already shifting in their favor.

(U) The South Vietnamese collapse and Communist victory of 1975 are now history. They happened with a speed that startled the world, including the victors, the vanquished, the American people, and their leaders. How could it have happened so fast? Military scholars and others may argue about the causes for years. No definitive answers are attempted here, but some clues from the so-called "cease-fire" period are worth examining.

(U) First, it must be stated categorically that *there never was a cease-fire*. This is not news. Everyone recognized that some fighting continued but *no one in Washington realized how intense the fighting was—until October 1974, near the end*. This incredible state of affairs resulted from poor reporting of South Vietnamese casualties.

(U) Chapter II pointed out that "friendly" battle deaths are the single best measure of the intensity of combat, and after the "cease-fire" agreement the South Vietnamese were the only "friendly" troops remaining in the action, so their battle deaths became the measure of combat intensity.

(U) The figures for RVNAF combat deaths reported to Washington indicated that comba-



during the year following the "cease-fire" was 75 percent below the 1972 level. This was duly reported to Congressional committees as evidence that the "cease-fire" was having a beneficial effect. In turn, this "fact" was used as part of the rationale for slashing aid to South Vietnamese forces during the summer of 1974.

(U) The problem was that the official South Vietnamese figures for battle deaths turned out to be twice as high as the figures reported to Washington in the operational messages.\* Thus, for the RVNAF the war in 1973 was only 30 percent less intense than in 1972, the worst year for casualties that the RVNAF ever had.

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\*With the large changeover of U.S. personnel after the cease-fire agreement, the RVNAF casualty-reporting system slipped back into a reliance on daily and weekly operational reports, which didn't pick up the late RVNAF reports—and half of the battle deaths were reported late. See Chapter X for a fuller description of the problem as it existed ca. 1967.

(U) In short, the war during the "cease-fire" period continued on for the RVNAF at a level of intensity equivalent to their losses during 1968, the year of the Tet offensive. The RVNAF took more casualties during 1974 than it did in any prior year except 1972. By December 1974 the South Vietnamese Army was a badly battered force. The effects of the beating showed in the pacification statistics, as Hamlet Evaluation System ratings slipped back once again to levels existing in 1969.

(U) The Communist forces, on the other hand, were getting stronger and stronger. They moved their logistics support into areas of South Vietnam they now controlled and protected it with strong antiaircraft defenses. They built roads, bridges, and pipelines, and they introduced several thousand more troops. By the end of 1974 they were in the strongest position they had since at least 1964. They launched their offensive, and the rest is history.

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173. "Changes in Consumer Prices," *International Financial Statistics*, Vol. XXVI, No. 9, September 1973, p. 35.
174. "Economic Impact—Korea and South Vietnam Buildups," *SEA Analysis Rpt.*, February 1967, p. 49.
175. Ibid., p. 50.
176. PAAS Urban Question 5151, asked of a total of 2,685 respondents in July and October 1971 and June, July, and August 1972; PAAS Rural Question 151, asked of 4,665 rural respondents during the same months.
177. PAAS Urban Question 5132, asked in May and October 1971 and May, June, July, and August 1972; PAAS Rural Question 132, asked in April, May, and October 1971 and June, July, and August 1972.
178. PAAS Urban Question 5150, asked of a total of 2,762 respondents in July and October 1971 and June, July, and August 1972; PAAS Rural Question 150, asked of 4,704 respondents during the same months.
179. PAAS Urban Question 5131, asked in May and October 1971 and May and June 1972 of 1,962 respondents; PAAS Rural Question 131, asked in March, May, and October 1971 and June 1972 of 3,622 respondents.
180. PAAS Urban Question 5133, asked of a total of 1,962 respondents in May and October 1971 and May and June 1972; PAAS Rural Question 133, asked of a total of 2,682 respondents in March and May 1971 and June 1972.
181. PAAS Urban Question 5147, asked of 1,375 respondents in June and July 1971 and March 1972; PAAS Rural Question 147, asked in July and October 1971 and March 1972 of a cumulative total of 2,884 respondents.
182. PAAS Rural Question 468, asked of 922 respondents in January 1972.
183. PAAS Urban Question 5103, asked in March, April, May, June, July, October, and November 1971 and April and May 1972; total of 4,010 respondents.
184. PAAS Urban Question 5148, asked in October 1971; PAAS Rural Question 148, asked in July and October 1971.
185. PAAS Urban Question 5149, asked in June, July, and October 1971 and March 1972 of 1,920 respondents; PAAS Rural Question 149, asked in July, October, and November 1971 and March 1972 of 3,834 respondents.
186. *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 13, 1973, p. 5.



# Appendix

## Index to Articles in the *SEA Analysis Reports*

(U) Fifty issues of the *Southeast Asia Analysis Report* were published from January 1967 through January 1972 by the Southeast Asia office under the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis). The Report had two purposes. First, it served as a vehicle to distribute the analyses produced by Systems Analysis on Southeast Asia. It thus provided other agencies an opportunity to tell us if we were wrong and to help prevent research duplications. We solicited and received frequent rebuttals or comments on our analyses, which sharpened our studies and stimulated better analysis by other agencies. Second, it was a useful management tool for getting more good work from our staff—they knew they must regularly produce studies which would be read critically throughout the Executive Branch.

(U) The first page of the Report stated that it “is not an official publication of the Department of Defense, and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis), or comparable officials.” The intent was solely to improve the quality of analysis on Southeast Asia problems, and to stimulate further thought and discussion. The report was successful in doing precisely this.

(U) We distributed about 350 copies of the Report each month to OSD (Office of the Secretary of Defense), the Military Departments, CINCPAC, and Saigon and to other interested agencies such as the Paris Delegation, AID, State Department,

CIA, and the White House Staff. Most copies circulated outside OSD were in response to specific requests from individual persons or agencies. Our readership included many of the key commanders, staff officers, and analysts in Washington and in the field. Their comments were almost always generous and complimentary, even when they disagreed with our conclusions. Some excerpts appear below:

(U) “I believe the *SEA Analysis Report* serves a useful purpose, and I would like to see its present distribution continued.” (Deputy Secretary of Defense, 31 May 1968)

(U) “We used a highly interesting item in your May Analysis Report as the basis for a note to the Secretary, which I’ve attached.” (State Department, 28 June 1967)

(U) “We were all most impressed with your first monthly *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*. Not only do we wish to continue to receive it, but we would appreciate it if we could receive 4 (four) copies from now on.” (White House, 9 February 1967)

(U) “Ambassador \_\_\_\_\_ has asked me to tell you that he has much appreciated and benefited from the studies and analyses of this publication.” (State Department/White House, 24 January 1969)

(U) “Congratulations on your January issue. The ‘Situation in South Vietnam’ article was especially interesting and provoking.” (State Department, 24 January 1969)



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(U) "I let Ambassador \_\_\_\_\_ take a swing at the paper. He made several comments which may be of interest to you. Many thanks for putting us back on distribution for your report. Also, despite the return volley, I hope you will continue sending your products." (MACV-CORDS, 17 June 1968)

(U) "As an avid reader (and user) of the *SEA Analysis Report*, I see a need for more rounded analyses in the pacification field and fewer simplistic constructs." (MACV-DEPCORDS, 17 April 1968)

(U) "The SEA Programs Division is to be commended for its perceptive analysis of topics that hold the continuing concern of this headquarters . . . The approach was thoughtfully objective throughout and it was particularly pleasing to note a more incisive recognition of factors that defy quantified expression." (Commander, US Army Vietnam-USARV, 29 November 1967)

(U) "In general, I think it is becoming the best analytical periodical I've seen yet on Vietnam (though there's not much competition)." (MACV-DEPCORDS, 21 April 1967)

(U) "Statistical extrapolations of this type serve an extremely useful purpose in many facets of our daily work." (CIA, 6 February 1967)

(U) "One of the most useful Systems Analysis products we have seen is the monthly Southeast Asia Progress Report. . . . Indeed it strikes many of us as perhaps the most searching and stimulating periodic analysis put out on Vietnam." (President of The Rand Corporation, 22 October 1969)

(U) In November 1968, fifty-five addressees answered a questionnaire about the Report: 52 said the report was useful, 2 said it was not, and 1 said, "The report does not meet an essential need of this headquarters"; nonetheless, it desired "to remain on distribution" for seven copies. From 48 questionnaires with complete responses, we found that an average 4.8 people read each copy—a projected readership of 500 to 950, depending on whether we assumed 1 or 2.4 readers of copies for which no questionnaire was returned.

(U) Readers responding to the questionnaire reported using the Report for the following purposes:

Information	42%
Analysis	31%
Policy Making	11%
Briefings	7%
Other	9%
	<hr/> 100%

In addition, readers reported about equal interest in each of the seven subject areas normally covered in the Report.

VC/NVA	18%
Air Operations	20%
RVNAF	17%
Pacification	13%
Friendly Forces	12%
Deployments	12%
Logistics/Construction	8%
	<hr/> 100%

(U) There was some negative reaction to the Report. Concern was expressed about "the distorted impressions" the Report left with the reader and its wide dissemination which "implies its acceptance by the Secretary of Defense, giving the document increased credibility."

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